

Issue 2011 **35**

GENDER FORUM

An Internet Journal for Gender Studies



Gender and Humour II: Reinventing the Genres of Laughter

Edited by
Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier

ISSN 1613-1878

Universität
zu Köln



Editor

Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier

University of Cologne
English Department
Albertus-Magnus-Platz
D-50923 Köln/Cologne
Germany

Tel +49-(0)221-470 2284

Fax +49-(0)221-470 6725

email: gender-forum@uni-koeln.de

Editorial Office

Laura-Marie Schnitzler, MA

Sarah Youssef, MA

Christian Zeitz (General Assistant, Reviews)

Tel.: +49-(0)221-470 3030/3035

email: gender-forum@uni-koeln.de

Editorial Board

Prof. Dr. Mita Banerjee,

Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (Germany)

Prof. Dr. Nilufer E. Bharucha,

University of Mumbai (India)

Associate Prof. Dr. Carmen Birkle,

Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany)

Prof. Dr. Ingrid Hotz-Davies,

Eberhard Karls University Tübingen (Germany)

Prof. Dr. Ralph Poole,

University of Salzburg (Austria)

Prof. Dr. Kathryn Schaffer,

University of Adelaide (Australia)

Prof. Dr. Chris Weedon,

Cardiff University (UK)

Editorial Deadlines

Spring Issue:

abstracts (October 1),

completed papers (January 1)

Summer Issue:

abstracts (January 1),

completed papers (April 1)

Fall Issue:

abstracts (April 1),

completed papers (July 1)

Early Career Researchers Special Issue:

abstracts (May 1),

completed papers (August 1)

Winter Issue:

abstracts (July 1),

completed papers (October 1)

About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum*.

Authors retain copyright of their work and articles are published under a Creative Commons licence.

There are no submission or page charges, and no colour charges.

Detailed Table Of Contents

Annette Keck and Ralph J. Poole: Editorial	1
Margaret D. Stetz: Notes on the Effect of Mr. Max Beerbohm on a Woman Writer	3
Diana Mantel: Carnival and Carnivorous Plants – Gender and Humor in the works of Ruth Landshoff-Yorck	12
Eduard Andreas Lerperger: “More Than Just Another Dumb Blonde Joke”: Humor and Gender in Anita Loos’s Novel <i>Gentlemen Prefer Blondes</i> and Howard Hawks’s Film Adaptation	32
Christine Künzel: The Most Dangerous Presumption: Women Authors and the Problems of Writing Satire	47
Anja Gerigk: Dis-placing Laughter in <i>30 Rock</i> . Beyond Corporate Comedy or Back to the Funny Female’s Modern Roots	69
List of Contributors	81

Editorial

By Annette Keck, University of Munich, Germany and Ralph J. Poole,
University of Salzburg, Austria

1 The second issue of "Gender and Humour" deals with effects of current phenomena of comic genres, above all with regard to literature and the popular media. Several of the essays investigate in particular the changes in gendered perceptions of humour within modernism, often highlighting the differences in the socio-political climate of the 1920s and '30s compared to later decades. Margaret Stetz here revisits Max Beerbohm's initial adoration and gradual rejection of Rebecca West, who in turn let go of her anger against his condescending ways in her essay collection *Ending in Earnest* (1931). Stetz interprets West's narrator as one who laughs in support of women, particularly modern, career-oriented women, relegating Beerbohm to an outdated past generation.

2 In an intercultural comparative essay, Diana Mantel discusses Ruth Landshoff-Yorck's first novel, *Die Vielen und der Eine* (1930), reflecting aspects of a carnivalesque, sexually permissive life-style of the Weimar Republic, and compares it to Landhoff's later work of the 1950s and its depiction of a sexually suppressed New England society. Whereas the 'blackening' of humour here mirrors the author's own experience of life in exile, Eduard Lerperger's comparative analysis of humour focuses on the transition from novel to film and the entailing historically and generically mutations implied in such a shift. Taking Anita Loos' novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) and Howard Hawks' film adaption of 1953 as example, Lerperger follows the transformation from satire to slapstick and thus from scathing social critique to popular musical entertainment.

3 Finally, Christine Künzel moves from a discussion of women's absence from the canon of literary satire to offering a fresh view on Gisela Elsner as critically blocked-out satirist. The 'surprising' success and recognition of writers such as Elfriede Jelinek necessitates revisiting forgotten female satirists of former generations, Künzel claims, in order to uncover the blind spots of literary studies that hide a long-standing female tradition of satire. Bringing gendered notions of humour to our immediate present times, Anja Gerigk in her essay on the TV comedy *30 Rock* bridges the gap of an understanding of the carnivalesque as a pre-modern form of social comedy with a contemporary usage of humour as reflecting institutionalized and gendered hierarchies. While claiming that today's popular media sophisticatedly and effectively manage to employ comic modes as metafictional strategies, we

ultimately can discern the need to look back to historically more distant and socio-culturally diverging genres of laughter and see how they have continuously been reinvented across the boundaries of high and popular culture, of literary and other forms of cultural production, as well as of gender and national distinctions.

Notes on the Effect of Mr. Max Beerbohm on a Woman Writer

By Margaret D. Stetz, University of Delaware, USA

Abstract:

Although Regina Barreca, the feminist comic theorist, has lamented the anxiety that supposedly keeps women from joking at the expense of those who have hurt them, Dame Rebecca West (1892–1983), the British novelist and critic, felt no such compunction. The laughter, moreover, that underpinned West’s “Notes on the Effect of Women Writers on Mr. Max Beerbohm,” from *Ending in Earnest: A Literary Log* (1931), was very angry indeed, and its origins were both political and personal. Her comic assault on Max Beerbohm (1872–1956) was a defense of working women in general, and of professional female authors in particular, against his attacks on their wish to be self-sustaining and competent human beings, rather than anachronistic ornaments. It was also, however, a response rooted in private grievance, for West was both an avowed admirer and an emulator of Beerbohm’s satirical and fantastic narratives, and she deeply resented his failure to respect her as she respected him. Indeed, it is impossible to understand West’s modernist fiction, such as *Harriet Hume* (1929), without acknowledging its debt to Beerbohm and to his 1890s Aesthetic Movement male contemporaries, such as Oscar Wilde, from whom she derived many of her comic strategies.

It is the special hardship of women that it is their destiny to make gifts and that the quality of their giving is decided by the quality shown by those who do the taking. No matter how full their hearts may be of tenderness and generosity as they hold out their gifts, if the taker snatch it without gratitude, then the givers count as neither tender nor generous, but merely easy. (West, *Harriet Hume* 55–56)

1 To love and not be loved in return is never pleasant. To reveal one’s ardor publicly — indeed, in print—and then to be taken for granted or scorned is doubly humiliating. It does not matter whether the type of love expressed is romantic, erotic, spiritual, filial, or merely the admiration of a devoted fan. Being rejected hurts—all the more if, like Dame Rebecca West (1892–1983), the sufferer still bears a wound from childhood, inflicted by a father who inspired worship, then turned away from the family and vanished. Yet for an unhappy lover who is also a novelist, an essayist, and professional journalist with a regular column, vengeance is, quite literally, ready to hand. It can take the form of laughter at the one who has let her down; done successfully, it can make him not merely unlovable, but ridiculous.

2 In her “Introduction” to *The Penguin Book of Women’s Humor* (1996), the feminist critic Regina Barreca laments the “misplaced anxiety” felt by most women, who “have been brought up to be so concerned with putting the welfare of others before our own that we can’t

let ourselves triumph with a great comeback” and who, therefore, refuse to engage in joking at the expense of those who have hurt them (8). That was never true of Rebecca West. The tone of the joking, moreover, that underpins West’s “Notes on the Effect of Women Writers on Mr. Max Beerbohm,” from her 1931 collection of essays and book reviews, *Ending in Earnest: A Literary Log*, is very angry indeed. Hers is an essay that uses anger in the service of feminist politics and implies throughout that the narrator is laughing in support of women. The particular women whom she defends against the sneering remarks of a man, Max Beerbohm, are those in the literary profession. Her larger interest, though, is in asserting the “dignity” (73) of middle-class women in general who choose careers—those who wish to be modern, self-sustaining, and competent human beings, rather than anachronistic ornaments. We can find here an early and admirable example of what Frances Gray, in *Women and Laughter* (1994), would later urge every feminist to do, if “feminism is to change all that needs to be changed”: that is, to recognize and consciously to “harness” the “power” of humor, which can be akin to “nuclear energy,” and “to engage with laughter as a social force” in the service of a just cause (33)

3 Yet this political impulse is only part of the story, for the undercurrent of rage which fuels the ridicule in this essay also sprang from a personal source. It was the fury of the spurned admirer, who had made a public spectacle of her adoration for a figure from an earlier literary generation—not “Mr. Max Beerbohm” the man, but Max Beerbohm (1872–1956) the artist—and who had poured out as a gift her words of effusive praise of his work. In return, she had received nothing, or worse than nothing—merely a reminder from him that she was ill suited to offer such judgments about literature and art in the first place, because of her gender.

4 This blow landed in a spot already tender from previous injuries. Certainly, these were due to many experiences which had taught her, as she put the matter decades later in an interview for the *Paris Review*, that “people . . . feel much softer towards the man, even though he might be a convicted criminal,” whereas they always had been “very rude” to her, “just because they’d heard I was a woman writer” (qtd. in Plimpton 85). But the snub she encountered in the late 1920s from Max Beerbohm, who had been her object of recent praise, also registered in terms of class. It was a slight from someone who had enjoyed all his life the easy privileges of the upper-middle-class rank to which West felt she was entitled by birth and from which she had been wrongly shut out by circumstances (especially, by the familial poverty resulting from her father’s desertion of his wife and young daughters). That Beerbohm not only failed to take her seriously as an artist, because she was a woman, but

expressed disapproval of her for seeking a career and supporting herself financially by writing, was intolerable, and she hit back. She did so, moreover, in a way perfectly designed to show that her talents were equal to his in the same genres at which he excelled—parody, satire, caricature, and also lyrical, nostalgic invocations of the past. To do so was more than a face-saving measure; it was a way actively to put her own work in conversation and even in competition with his, as she had also done a year earlier, through her fantasy novel about love, death, and London—*Harriet Hume* (1928)—which responded to his classic 1911 comic fantasy about love, death, and Oxford, *Zuleika Dobson*.

5 West's article about her encounter with Max Beerbohm at a literary occasion—a dinner party at London's Carlton Hotel for Du Bose Heyward (1885–1940), American author of the 1925 novel *Porgy*—may be familiar to some now through its republication in 1931 in *Ending in Earnest: A Literary Log*. It first appeared, however, under the title “Mr. Beerbohm and the Literary Ladies” in one of her monthly “A London Letter” columns for the June 1929 issue of the *Bookman*, a magazine issued in the United States that also circulated in Britain. But the origins of this article lay in an earlier review (which was never reprinted), from 14 October 1928, for the *New York Herald Tribune*, of Max Beerbohm's volume, *A Variety of Things*. Beerbohm's book was, as its title implied, a collection of miscellaneous pieces, some of them dating back to the 1890s, the time when he first appeared on the London literary scene as a witty, dandified young contributor to the *Yellow Book* and a member of Oscar Wilde's circle of friends and acquaintances. Several of the stories in *A Variety of Things*, such as the wry portrait of an imaginary politician named T. Fenning Dodworth, were in the style of Beerbohm's more famous *Seven Men* (1919). Others, including a fantasy about the dawn of civilization, “The Dreadful Dragon of Hay Hill,” showed the influence of Oscar Wilde's aesthetic, yet also biting satire, late-Victorian fairy tales. *A Variety of Things* was, however, a disparate and rather slight volume, especially when compared with the more focused and wittier *A Christmas Garland* (1912), which had skewered one contemporary author after another with brilliant parodies of their work.

6 Yet no one who came upon West's rapturous review, titled “On Not Telling All that One Knows,” on the front page of the *Tribune*'s Sunday “Books” section, would have suspected that the publication of *A Variety of Things* was anything less than an event of major proportions, of the sort to shake the foundations of the transatlantic literary world. West began her appraisal of it by invoking Shakespeare, describing his retreat from London to Stratford-upon-Avon and from playwriting, while alluding to Beerbohm's self-exile from England to Rapallo, Italy: “[Shakespeare] knew more about the universe than the rest of us, and the effect

of that knowledge was to make him turn his back on all opportunities either to extend it or share it with his fellowmen” (West, “On Not Telling” 1). By the end of her review, she had compared Beerbohm favorably with Shakespeare as a visionary and philosopher; she had, even more remarkably, found in Beerbohm’s manner, when encountered in person, a quality that she also attributed to Shakespeare: “For one noticed that in . . . [his] face there gleamed just such an enamel of determined reserve of dogged blandness, as surprised us in the well known bust of Shakespeare. Here was another who had determined not to tell all he knew; and who knew so very much that his determination made the hair stand up one’s head” (12). What was it that Beerbohm, like Shakespeare, supposedly “knew”? According to West’s review, it was the very thing that West herself claimed to apprehend and wished to impart to others, both through her fiction and through her criticism—the essence that she called “reality”:

Max Beerbohm . . . [is] not only a person (as we had known) of exquisite taste but of a positively Titanic comprehension of art. One felt that the infallibility with which he knew . . . [which] avenue . . . leads straight to comprehension of reality and the perpetuation of the comprehended truth came from the most powerful grasp of the nature of reality. He knew as well as any man what is between the earth and the sky. His mind was as wide as the earth, [and] it was as tall as the sky (12).

7 In this 1928 review, West paid Beerbohm the ultimate compliment. She aligned his work with what she had defined that very same year, in a long essay titled “The Strange Necessity,” as both the deepest human impulse and the force that drove the greatest, most daring art of the present, such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*: the “immediate necessity,” inherent “from man’s earliest moments,” to “know what it is all about” (West, “Strange Necessity” 59), with “it” referring to the secret of existence. To make such exalted claims on behalf of Beerbohm was a bold move indeed and one that put her at odds with many of her modernist peers, in whose eyes his comic writings and caricatures were an amusing but irrelevant survival of 1890s aesthetic modes.

8 The form in which she presented this paean was, moreover, itself a tribute to Beerbohm. Breaking with the conventions of the book review as a genre, she reached back to the humorous aesthetic essay as Beerbohm had practiced and perfected it for over three decades. Instead of merely discussing the volume at hand, she related an anecdote about “my first meeting with Mr. Max Beerbohm. It was an extremely agreeable meeting because of the absolute identity between his private personality and the personality (surely the most graceful in the world) which one had learned to know from his writings.” The occasion was their joint attendance at a play by Ibsen featuring “a famous foreign actress” who, twenty years before,

had persuaded an earlier generation “that she represented the absolute of the dramatic art” (West, “On Not Telling” 1). From these details, it is possible to identify the actress as Eleanora Duse and to date West’s first encounter with Beerbohm as having occurred in June 1923, when Duse “went to London for a brief engagement at the New Oxford Theatre,” in the role of Ellida in Henrik Ibsen’s *The Lady from the Sea* (Winwar 316). West narrates her meeting with Beerbohm in a comic framework and does so while putting aside any feminist solidarity with the woman performer, whom she describes not as acting, but merely as “exultantly wailing.” So

we asked Mr. Beerbohm for enlightenment. . . . He had seen her . . . in the years when she established this name for perfection. Wouldn’t he tell us if she had ever deserved it? Mr. Beerbohm . . . exposed her pretensions, and the pretensions of all bad artists, in a sentence so good that one immediately forgot its words and absorbed only its meaning (12)

Beerbohm’s assessment of the actress to West in 1923 appears to have echoed the uncharitable comments he had published in a 1907 review, where he had lamented that “air of listlessness” of “Signora Duse, who, in this as in every other part that she plays, behaved like a guardian angel half-asleep at her post over humanity” (Beerbohm, “Hedda Gabler” 281–82)

9 In this review, West not only appropriated Beerbohm’s witty voice, but replicated his facility with Wildean aesthetic prose, echoing lines about the moon from Wilde’s play *Salome*, as she discussed one of the selections from *A Variety of Things*: “You will have to read it once for nothing but its good looks[,] for the phrases that are shining and delicate as a new moon, and once for its subject, which has something of the chill of moonlight” (12). But she had just performed a similar feat in her novel *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy*, which also dates from 1928. There, she had turned the plot of Beerbohm’s 1911 comedy, *Zuleika Dobson: Or An Oxford Love Story*, on its head. As in *Zuleika*, the mystical connection between its protagonists inspires a suspension of what is usually called reality. Instead of the pearl studs and earrings that, in Beerbohm’s fantasy, inexplicably alter their color in response to the passions of Zuleika and the Duke of Dorset, West creates an indissoluble link, in life and in death, between Harriet Hume and Arnold Condorex that results in Harriet’s seemingly paranormal ability to hear all of her lover’s thoughts. The major change, however, that West works upon Beerbohm’s novel is a feminist one. For Beerbohm’s Zuleika, the coldhearted, delicately beautiful *femme fatale* who is untalented as a professional conjuror, but who inspires hundreds of male undergraduates to kill themselves, West substitutes a coldhearted and murderous *homme fatale* and a delicately beautiful woman

musician, who successfully works magic upon the piano, from which she can elicit sounds merely by speaking to it.

10 The strongest bond, however, between West's novel and Beerbohm's is through their shared attitude toward time and place. Beerbohm's tale is indeed "An Oxford Love Story"—a lyrical ode to his love for Oxford, which is inhabited by the spirits of the Classical Greek past, who are always alive, watching, and speaking, sometimes to comic effect. So, too, West's *Harriet Hume* is a love song to London, in which the fantastic, animate, and humorous presences of both Neo-Classical works of art and their eighteenth-century makers, such as the Adam Brothers, are essential parts of the daily scene. In *Harriet Hume*, West illustrates her own unshakable attachment to what she had identified, in the essay "The Dead Hand," as "this English habit of wandering into the past as a refuge from the distressful present"—a habit also brought to the peak of artistry by Max Beerbohm (West "The Dead Hand" 39). Both writers celebrated what, in *Harriet Hume*, West had her female protagonist describe as the "'in-and-out work between the centuries,'" a principle of temporal interdependence that enabled creative figures, in particular, to find ways of "'slipping through time'" (West, *Harriet Hume* 133).

11 Did Max Beerbohm recognize the homage West had just paid him in her 1929 companion fantasy about an English city? Did he thank her for her effusiveness of her praise of *A Variety of Things*? Did he appreciate how she had gone out on a limb, in setting her judgment of him against that of her contemporaries, the younger generation of British modernists, for whom Beerbohm was little more than a historical curiosity? Quite the contrary. Only a few months after West's review appeared, they met again at the fateful party for Du Bose Heyward given by his British publisher and, as West records in "Notes on the Effect of Women Writers on Mr. Max Beerbohm," Beerbohm insulted her, not once, but twice. Looking around the room "with distaste," as "his eye was lighting on members of my own sex, on members of my own profession," he had turned to her confidentially: "He confessed it, in his gentle courteous voice . . . he did not like literary ladies. He did not mind saying as much to me, since I was of course an exceptional woman. . . . Yes, he repeated, having ventured the bland proviso, he did not like literary ladies" (West, "Notes" 67).

12 How foolish of Beerbohm not to have anticipated the consequences of speaking this way to such an auditor. From 1898 to 1910, he had the benefit himself of a regular journalistic platform, as drama critic for the *Saturday Review*. Should he not have anticipated that West would use her own column in the *Bookman* to advantage and vent her outrage in public? For that is indeed what she did. She responded in a way that not only subjected him to ridicule,

but employed his own weapons of satire and, moreover, of physical caricature, for Beerbohm was of course one of the greatest visual artists of caricature who ever lived. Here is her word-painting of his appearance:

He presented himself at the party, looking extraordinarily like one of those little Chinese dragons which are made in the porcelain known as *blanc de Chine*. Like them he has a rounded forehead and eyes that press forward in their eagerness; and his small hands and feet have the neat compactness of paws. His white hair, which sweeps back in trim convolutions like one of these little dragon's manes, his blue eyes, and his skin, which is as clear as a child's, have the gloss of newly washed china. He is, moreover, obviously precious, and not of this world, though relevant to its admiration: a museum piece, if ever there was one. (West, "Notes" 66–67)

Gone from her description of him is any likeness to the bust of Shakespeare. In its place is the portrait of a tiny monster—an artificial and anachronistic monster at that—as Beerbohm himself might have drawn it of someone else, in one of his verbal or visual caricatures.

13 Midway through these "Notes" on how the presence of women writers distresses the little "dragon," however, comes a bravura performance of a different sort. Claiming to be possessed of Beerbohm's spirit and "to have passed over to his state of mind"—that is, to his idealization of the past, especially of "the thing which seems to him most beautiful . . . the society which died with the 'nineties"—West's narrative persona produces a gorgeous passage of imitation Aesthetic-movement prose. In it, she details for the reader a memory of seeing her own mother enrobed as a decorative and useless object—just the sort of image of femininity that Beerbohm admires—in turn-of-the-century dress: "On a waved plethora of hair, I remember, a large hat road like a boat, with a bird's wing for its sail." With her "minute waist," "her sleeves" that are "vast bells," and "her skirts" made into "a vaster bell under which flounces and flounces of stiff silk rattled like silver shrapnel" (West, "Notes" 70), West's mother becomes, in this fantastic picture, the image of Zuleika Dobson.

14 West saves the best for last, however, with a punchline to her essay equal to that of the ending of Beerbohm's famous comic story "Enoch Soames," from the volume *Seven Men*. There, the figure of Satan injures the Max-Beerbohm-like narrator's pride by cutting him in the street, to signal that, though he may fancy himself an important artist, he is a mere nobody. In her "Notes," West reports gleefully that, at the party for Du Bose Heyward, one of the very modern "literary ladies" who represented the type that Beerbohm despised—the novelist G[ladys]. B[ertha]. Stern (1899–1973)—met and attempted awkwardly to make conversation with this embodiment of the sexist past: "Thus it was she came to turn to the most famous living caricaturist and asked him in accents so clear that there could be no possible mistake about what she said, 'Did you ever learn to draw, Mr. Beerbohm?'" (73).

The parody of the conclusion to one of Beerbohm's own stories is deft, subtle, and killing. As Irving Berlin's Annie Oakley once put it, "Anything you can do, I can do better."

15 West's *coup de grâce* to Beerbohm's smugness illustrates, moreover, a principle about the operations of comedy in a gendered context that Virginia Woolf (West's slightly older contemporary) had already articulated in a 1905 essay titled "The Value of Laughter." Women, according to Woolf, were the "chief ministers of the comic spirit," for they were unlikely to be impressed or taken in by the "affectations and unrealities" associated with masculine power. The service they could perform, through their laughter directed at men in general and at powerful men in particular, would be both a difficult and a necessary one: "All the hideous excrescences that have overgrown our modern life, the pomps and conventions and dreary solemnities, dread nothing so much as the flash of laughter which, like lightning, shrivels them up and leaves the bones bare" (Woolf 60).

16 Whether Beerbohm felt himself—or any part of himself—shriveled from the effects of West's laughter, history does not record, nor do we know how he felt about seeing her competing with him successfully on his own literary turf. What we do know is that time and circumstances allowed her to have the last and very mixed word. In her 1982 memoir and meditation on events of the year 1900, she summed up her estimation of her onetime literary hero and later antagonist in a single, complex sentence that turned upon itself with an irony comparable to that of one of Beerbohm's own pronouncements: "If one bought *The Saturday Review* [in 1900], one could recognize the early, delicate, surprising talent of Max Beerbohm, who expressed himself with a swooning air, as if he doubted whether he would live till next Thursday, though he was to live fifty-six years into the next century and become one of the best broadcasters who ever spoke over the air, introducing elegance into a raw new technique" (West, 1900 138).

17 The point with which I will end is that Rebecca West *wanted* to do what Beerbohm did and to do it better. We misrepresent her, if we define her—as some critics have done—as *sui generis*, unaffected by or uninterested in her immediate literary predecessors of the 1890s. Her relations with these predecessors were complicated and painful, as they were with all father figures, both actual and metaphorical. The ones she loved treated her badly in return. Yet they were also enormously influential, and we cannot understand her use of fantasy, of narrative voice, of nostalgia for place, of elaborate visual descriptions, or especially of comedy, unless we also recognize, within the modernist woman writer whose mind was as wide as the sky and as tall as the earth, a precious little dragon.

Works Cited

- Barreca, Regina. "Introduction." *The Penguin Book of Women's Humor*. Ed. Regina Barreca. New York: Penguin, 1996. 1–10.
- Beerbohm, Max. "Enoch Soames." *Seven Men*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920. 9–54.
- ."Hedda Gabler." *Last Theatres, 1904–1910*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1970. 279–282.
- ."A Variety of Things." 1928; rpt. London: William Heinemann, 1953.
- ."Zuleika Dobson, or an Oxford Love Story." 1911; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1988.
- Gray, Frances. *Women and Laughter*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994.
- Plimpton, George, ed. "Rebecca West." *Women Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*. New York: Penguin, 1989. 71–105.
- West, Rebecca. "The Dead Hand." *Ending in Earnest: A Literary Log*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1931. 33–40.
- ."Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy." London: Hutchinson, 1929.
- ."1900." New York: Viking, 1982.
- ."Notes on the Effect of Women Writers on Mr. Max Beerbohm." *Ending in Earnest: A Literary Log*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1931. 66–74.
- ."On Not Telling All That One Knows." *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 October 1928, "Books": 1+.
- ."The Strange Necessity." *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1928. 13–198.
- Winwar, Frances. *Wingless Victory: A Biography of Gabriele D'Annunzio and Eleanora Duse*. New York: Harper Bros., 1956.
- Woolf, Virginia. "The Value of Laughter." *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume One: 1904–1912*. Ed. Andrew McNeillie. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986. 58–60.

Carnival and Carnivorous Plants – Gender and Humor in the works of Ruth Landshoff-Yorck

By Diana Mantel, LMU München, Germany

Abstract:

My article focuses on the connection of gender and humour in some works of the German-American author Ruth Landshoff-Yorck. My analysis will show that, while both topics are important, their connection changes over the course of Landshoff's work: it is light and easygoing in the early works, full of joyful transgression in aspects of gender and sexuality, like in her novel *Die Vielen und der Eine* (1930), but carnal and sometimes disgusting in the later ones, like in the short story *The Opening Night* (1959) and its German version, *Durch die Blume* (1957) – especially in the omnivorous (and omnisexual) plant appearing in these stories. The theoretical foundation for the analyses carried out in this article is provided by Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the Grotesque and Carnavalesque. Bringing together Bakhtin and Landshoff and investigating their parallels and contrasts can not only illuminate Landshoff's works, but also widen the understanding of Bakhtin's theory of humor, in order to demonstrate the extent to which these ideas are helpful in relation to aspects of gender.

Es ist nur gut dass auch fast alles andere in dieser Welt unerklaet [!] bleibt. Sonst koentts [!] einen ja bedruecken. Aber so? Der Welt gegenueber kommt man sich eh mehr und mehr wie der Valentin vor. der von Muenchen. [...] Ich sollte eigentlich auf [!] mich ins komische flueecten [!]. (Landshoff, zwiespalt 6)

1 Humor, and taking refuge in it, as described here in one of Landshoff's later articles, is a theme common to Landshoff's writing – even if she seldom wrote it as explicitly as here. Especially her early works have been characterised as an “Amalgam aus ästhetischer Avantgarde und leidenschaftlich-leichter Unterhaltung” (Grisko 255) and are unique because of the combination of artistic claim and nonchalant humor. Even though her writing in her last years was less blithe and demonstrated confusion between the author's two languages, English and German, as can be seen in the first quotation (Landshoff, zwiespalt 1), - it also showed a more sarcastic side of her humor.

2 The exploration of gender in her works follows a similar pattern and the way the subject is handled changes over the course of her complete works: the easy-going and amusing understanding of gender and sexuality in her early works is replaced towards the end of her writing career by a strict separation of them, accompanied by much black humor. This article describes this change and the particular characteristics of her humor in an analysis of her first novel *Die Vielen und der Eine* (1930) and one of her short stories *The Opening Night* (1959). The latter exists in two versions, one in German and one in English published two years later. The two editions differ not only in their titles (the German is entitled *Durch*

die Blume), but also in their endings – thus offering a grotesque form of the stories themselves. This article concludes with a comparison of the two versions.

3 The theoretical foundation for the analyses carried out in this text is provided by various works by Mikhail Bakhtin. While the focus is placed on Landshoff's works, Bakhtin's theory of humor offers a theoretical framework which illuminates aspects of Landshoff's writing – even though many aspects of Bakhtin's theories have to be left aside, for example the historical context of his works or his anthropological ideas. Landshoff and Bakhtin's ideas are, of course, non-congruent and do not explicitly correlate to each other, however many aspects of Bakhtin's theory are reflected in Landshoff's works. This is especially the case for ideas of transgression, the carnival as an actual festival (see *Die Vielen und der Eine*) or the emphasis of particular parts of the body (see *The Opening Night / Durch die Blume*).

4 But while gender plays an important role in Landshoff's works, it never appears in Bakhtin's theories. Even if many elements of his theories, such as the openness of the transgressive or the grotesque body touch on subjects such as gender, a direct relationship is never explicitly established. Landshoff's experimentation with gender, in contrast, is often analog to Bakhtin's theories, but also demonstrates many differences. Thus bringing together Bakhtin and Landshoff and investigating their parallels and contrasts can not only illuminate Landshoff's works, but also widen our understanding of Bakhtin's theory of humor, to demonstrate the extent to which these ideas are helpful in relation to aspects of gender.

5 *Die Vielen und der Eine* is not only a typical example of Landshoff's early writing, it also marks an important turning point in her career as this was the only one of her three novels written in the Weimar Republic to actually be published. Before the takeover of the Nazis abruptly ended her thriving career, Landshoff had been one of the pillars of the Berlin bohemia in the 1920s:

Im Berlin ihrer Jugendjahre war [Ruth Landshoff-Yorck] ein Liebling der damaligen Edel-Boheme – schön, klug, unternehmend, vorurteilslos. Sie hatte sich ihr eigenes Milieu geschaffen, das aus den Kreisen der Kunst, der Bühne, der jeunesse dorée, der Avantgarde aller Gebiete bestand. (n.N., Memoriam 8)

6 She was friend of many contemporary artists, such as Annemarie Schwarzenbach and Klaus Mann, and tried her hand at many professions such as painting, modelling and acting before she started writing (For a closer look at her life c.f. Schoppman or Pendl, *Exilantin*). Her next two novels, *Roman einer Tänzerin* und *Die Schatzsucher in Venedig* were supposed to be published in 1933, but never made it into print. The reasons for this were not only Landshoff's Jewish ancestry (she was the niece of the publisher Samuel Fischer) and her

political views, but also the novels themselves, which contained radical ideas on gender and sexuality.

7 In Landshoff's first novel, "carnival" appears in its literal meaning as an actual fancy dress party: "Das war es, was sie berauschte an Berlin. Das gab es in keiner anderen Stadt. Tausend glückliche Leute, lachend, tanzend, liebend und ein Krach, daß man betäubt die Hände an die Ohren hielt, um dann sofort mitzumachen, zu lachen und zu tanzen." (Landshoff, *Die Vielen und der Eine*, from here on abbreviated to DV). At this party in Berlin not only the novel comes to an end, but also the love story of the protagonists Louis Lou and Percy. Their story can be summarized in a few words: the German journalist Louis Lou travels to New York where she meets the rich idler Percy. They subsequently split up, travel independently through America and Europe, meet again, argue, split again and finally reunite in Berlin. While the story itself seems to be simple and consists of a conglomeration of many different stories, the playful display of gender and its narration is not simple at all.

8 Of course Bakhtin understood the term carnival not only in the sense of an actual festival (Karnevalistisches 61); rather he widens his definition of the term by saying that "Karneval wird gelebt. [...] Das karnevalistische Leben ist ein Leben, das aus der Bahn des Gewöhnlichen herausgetreten ist." (Karnevalisierung 48), that is to say that 'carnival' is not only used to describe a special kind of festival, but also to depict a kind of style, a turning of established values and categories into something new. This style becomes especially visible in Landshoff's novel in the experimentation with gender and sexuality – and also in the style of narration, for example at the beginning of the novel:

Man könnte so anfangen: Depuis sa plus tendre enfance elle a toujours adoré les matelots und alles, was mit ihnen zusammenhängt : Signalpfeifen, Leuchttürme, Sturmband und Kap Horn. [...] Das hat aber mit folgendem nichts zu tun: Wenn zufällig ein Matrose auftauchen sollte, so denken Sie nicht, aha, endlich eine Bezugnahme auf den Beginn. Ich nehme nicht Bezug. Ich nehme vorweg. Überlassen Sie doch bitte mir, Beziehungen herzustellen. Depuis sa plus tendre enfance bevorzugte sie Matrosen. (DV 5)

Although it is left open as to where the references ("Bezugnahme[n]") and where the presumptions ("Vorwegnahmen") start (and why that should make any difference), some lines later a new beginning comes up (which is suggesting a new and different start of the novel):

Man könnte auch anders anfangen: Wie wäre es mit einer Hauptperson, die nachher in die Fabel führt? Mit ihrer Personalbeschreibung in einer Landschaft mit einem besonderen Wetter? (DV 5)

The openness of the discours in the novel is mirrored in the openness of its characters, "die jung waren und noch oft ein neues Leben anfangen konnten." (DV 124) – everything is

possible, nothing is strictly defined. For these characters there are no boundaries between gender, sexuality or language(s).

9 While the beginning of the novel is marked out by an openness and plurality in the style of the narration, this is also explored in several other elements of the plot. Percy's and Louis Lou's travels end at a particular kind of party: a fancy dress party. Louis Lou, the female yet androgynous protagonist, attends in a pink aviator's uniform while her friend Jack wears a blue uniform "weil Jack ein Junge ist" (DV 152); this seems to be a typical display of gender clichés. Yet Percy, unaware of the costumes the others chose to wear, also arrives in an aviator's uniform – only his overall is white. The situation becomes a versatile play on colors and their clichés: While pink might be typical for girls, Louis Lou is anything than an ordinary girl; she is said to be a look-alike of the famous statue of David several times (e.g. DV 29 or 36). For Jack, the color blue seems to be most appropriate; although he is still a boy, hardly 15 years old, he is continuously pretending to be a grown-up man. Percy's white is, in contrast, most equivocal as it suggests him having no gender at all and marks him as undefined. Indeed, his sexuality is scrutinized several times in the novel (e.g. DV 35), although he seems to love Louis Lou. Here colors do not establish a classification, instead they show that the idea of a system based on colors is ridiculous. Gender and sexuality become fashions, something to turn on and off again, a simple question of what to wear.

10 An amusing aspect is the fact that Percy is indeed an aviator – flying is the only profession he actually manages to learn in his otherwise non-industrious life. Moreover, wearing his actual working clothes becomes absurd: the other guests are also wearing uniforms at the fancy-dress party, and doing so no longer shows a special status. Furthermore, in the time of the Weimar Republic, flying was not considered a particularly masculine activity (Koschorke 153). Rather it was only considered exotic when women became aviators – Percy does thus not underline his masculinity by becoming an aviator, he just does something that would be considered progressive for women (Fell 216). In putting on his actual flying dress for a costume party he devalues his own status by reducing his profession to a simple costume.

11 Using a uniform for fashion is also addressed in the passage on the gay subculture in New York, but in this case the uniform in question is a sailor's instead of an aviator's:

Es gibt hier nicht sehr viele Frauen auf diesem Weg und nicht sehr viele Mädchen. Aber dafür gibt es viele junge Burschen in Uniform – [...] obwohl sie doch hier kaum im Beruf sein können. [...] Die breiten Kragen haben einen Rand aus Seide, und am Ende des tiefen Ausschnittes, der ungeheuer nackt wirkt, glüht manchmal eine rote Nelke. Hugh weiß, daß

viele von ihnen keine richtigen Matrosen sind. Sie tragen diese kleidsame Tracht wohl als eine Art Abendkleid, als eine Art Pyjama. (DV 38)

12 In this passage the constant transgression back and forth between party costume and professional uniform is taken to the extreme. The idea behind a real uniform is a performance of masculinity (at work and war). Here, however, uniforms are being used for the purposes of courtship, as a costume representing excessive masculinity that is, in turn, used to attract other men. The typical male uniform becomes an “Abendkleid” or pyjamas, something to be worn on special occasions or in bed respectively, and the former definitely has female connotations. The uniform itself has been altered with accessories and is no longer martial. The uniform is now worn for love, not war. It no longer signifies a profession or a status, it now signifies sexual orientation and the search for attraction. The old uniform is dissolved into a costume of sex(es). This is close to what Bakhtin calls “profanation”: the former status of the uniform is changed – but here the change is entirely positive, and not a kind of degradation, especially not in a religious sense.

13 As is the case for fashion in the novel, so the relationship of Percy and Louis Lou reveals the performativity of gender. Their relationship goes through several ups and downs and one of their meetings is especially remarkable:

Sie flirtete: “Nie werde ich Ihnen die Sache mit Jack verzeihen. Ich finde Sie widerlich.“ Und Percy rachsüchtig, aber mit schmerzdem Herzen: “Maria tanzt viel weicher als Sie. Sie ist so eine sanfte richtige Frau. Ein schönes, schwarzhaariges Tierchen. Sie tanzen ja wie ein Junge, Louis Lou, wie ein kräftiger Junge aus einer Wildwest-Bar.“ “Und sie tanzen wie ein Mädchen mit Hüftbewegungen und ganz lose.“ “Und Sie sind ein moderner Typ – pfui – ein Zwitter. Nicht richtig lieben könnt ihr modernen Mädchen. Vielleicht lieben Sie ihren Hund, diesen Bastard.“ Aber da hatte er ihre Faust im Gesicht. Louis Lou wollte das gar nicht. Sie wollte viel lieber weiblich sein und sich küssen lassen, aber er hatte Cecil einen Bastard genannt. Und Percy, der sonst so hart im Nehmen war, weinte. (DV 85)

Their dispute is defined from the outset as “flirting” – a courtship and a playful fight of the sexes. To invoke Judith Butler's ideas, this scene demonstrates performative acts of gender being constantly reproduced as a performance, instead of existing separately (Butler 25). Interlaced with classical clichés such as referring to a woman as “Tierchen” and modern stereotypes of gender such as a cowboy, everything about their flirtation is role play. Describing their conversation as “flirtation” underlines the fact that their talk is not about an arbitrary topic, rather that there is a specific aim in mind: seduction. Both partners accuse each other of not conforming to their gender. The “abnormality” of their behaviour is emphasized by the next moment when Louis Lou throws a punch and Percy cries. Even if it were noted that Percy normally behaves differently, this would obviously be an ironic remark,

as he never acts tough. This is also true of Louis Lou, who never demonstrates her alleged wish to be female, neither with Percy nor with her other affair, Ingo. In a subversive turn, the novel places a man and a woman facing each other, only in each other's position. This results in the irony that the positions are revealed to be simple roles with no fixed points in a game called "flirting".

14 While the twenties were a time when gender issues (such as the New Woman) were constantly discussed, and such discourse is also to be found in this passage. The topic is not simply shown, rather it is to be found in the characters' discourse, notably when Percy calls Louis Lou a "moderne[r] Typ", a "Zwitter" – a accusation that was typically levied against women at the time (Kessemeier 201-202). Yet the true joke here lies in the fact that Percy is so undefined; he is also a modern type and yet cannot be classified as he also breaks ranks.

15 The discussion of gender stereotypes also scrutinizes the characters' bodies. As previously mentioned, Louis Lou's appearance is not described as feminine rather as boy-like with a strong resemblance of the statue of the naked David (DV 36). Percy is obsessed with Louis Lou, with the statue of David and their resemblance. Furthermore, he wants to make a statue of this, and while he has a picture of the famous statue hanging as inspiration in his atelier, he has his own ideas for his creation:

„Ich werde eine Plastik modellieren, mit Beinen wie du sie hast und mit deinem Lächeln, aber sie wird einen Busen haben – einen zwitterhaften, kleinen Busen, der rund ist wie zwei Mandarinen. Und vermutlich wird der Rücken sehr schön sein – vermutlich mit zwei Grübchen am Ende der Wirbelsäule.“ Und wie er das sagt, wird Percy sehr rot. (DV 37)

This nearly impossible body, consisting of Louis Lou and the statue, becomes Percy's ideal, combining many aspects. But the humor develops further: ultimately Percy will not be able to create this statue as he is not the great, male artist of the avant-garde able to recreate the female form as Pygmalion did. Instead, he is only able to dream of something which already partial exists and bares resemblance to a clearly-defined body, adding hermaphroditic, rather than typical female, breasts. By imagining creating a statue resembling David, who in turn resembles Louis Lou, a round dance of copies of copies of copies evolves – and no definite original is definable. An endless circuit of quotations is created with no start, end or result – everything is an imitation of something else.

16 Louis Lou's body forms the center-point of this discussion. Even her name seems to reflect her androgynous nature; a combination of a male name (Louis) and a female name (Lou) – and the name creates the figure. While staying in Oxford, Louis Lou plays the part of Eurydice in a boarding school's play because the original actor had fallen ill. Ironically, the

boarding school is exclusively for boys and Louis Lou takes on a role formerly played by a boy. Nobody is supposed to find out that Louis Lou is female as it would have caused a scandal in conservative Oxford (“Ein Mädchen wäre ein Faustschlag in das Gesicht der Tradition, sagten sie.“; DV 128). Louis Lou manages to pretend she is a boy, even evoking the criticism of one of the (female) viewers:

“[...] hätte man für diese Rolle nicht einen Jungen finden können, der eine Idee fraulichere Allüren hatte? [...] Früher gab es doch immer irgendeinen Jungen in der Schule, der ganz besonders für Frauenrollen geeignet war. [...] Wie gesagt, eine Idee zu knabenhaft, diese Eurydice.” (DV 129)

Again Louis Lou defies all expectations. Not only she is too masculine to be a female, she also, in her role of a woman in a play, tricks the audience with her gender performance. It is a play within a play, a performance within a performance. The real humor lies in the fact that it is not her role in the play that is well performed, rather her role of a male actor playing a woman in a play which everybody believes should only be performed by a boy. Thus, a mocking circle of gender imitation is created and taken to the extreme. Again, this passage reveals the open way in which gender is handled in the novel. Gender is depicted as a construction made of copies and endless performances.

17 What is true of this performance within a performance – namely that nothing is what it first seems - is also true of the characters' sexuality. This is most apparent in Ingo, the sailor. He is picked up by Louis Lou on her journey back to Europe which, at first, proves the earlier statement suggesting her preference for seamen. However, this is then taken to the point of absurdity. Ingo, who initially is the ideal of a man, becomes insecure when he has to leave his usual surroundings and prove himself as a man: “Er, vollkommen blond, schön, ritterlich und gut fundiert, musste anfangen, sich zu beweisen, und da wurde er unsicher.“ (DV 97). He finally annoys Louis Lou so much that she abandons him in front of a – of all places – ladies' restroom, while she escapes through a back exit. Here, he soon is picked up by Percy's male secretary Hugh and without further explanation they become a couple. It is here that the real admirer of sailors appears: it is Hugh, who „sehnte sich nach einem schönen jungen Gott, der gewaltsam war und süß, und ganz für ihn verloren auf dem Meere schwamm.“ (DV 123). Ultimately Ingo is able to prove himself to be the “real man” he wants to be – although in doing so he becomes a homosexual man's ideal instead of a woman's. Hugh and Ingo leave together some chapters later to live with Ingo's family by the North Sea – the homosexual couple is given a happier ending and an easier ride than any of the other couples in the novel. Not even sexuality is what it seems: it can change without any problem – and without being described as a problem. The borders of sexuality are not only fluid, they hardly exist at all.

18 The motif of the sailor appears from the very beginning of the novel, without ever being a type of symbol or metaphor (or a simple reference as the beginning suggests). The sailor is the constant representation of this new life and appears as an ideal for both women and gay men, as a performance of masculinity (as in Ingo's case) and also as a costume, which is no longer a uniform. The sailor is a recurrent thread throughout the novel: he constantly and playfully changes and transforms within the discourse on gender in the same way as everything else in the novel. Everything is in motion, defying expectations and this fluidity sweeps away the borders of sexuality, gender, bodies, language, discourses. Borders that could lead to classifications simply no longer exist. There is no support of a fixed point of view, either in the narration or the language(s). Highlighting the strangeness of modern life here offers a new kind of freedom. At the same time, the genre of the novel is in motion, through its constant playful and ironic use of discourse resembling pop literature – pop in the sense of a definition of style, as a “Transformation”, “im Sinne einer dynamischen Bewegung, bei der kulturelles Material und seine sozialen Umgebungen sich gegenseitig neu gestalten und bis dahin fixe Grenzen überschreiten.” (Diedrichsen 274). There is a constant use of discourse and quotation which is used to cross any kind of border. Nothing is fixed and exactly this is celebrated.

19 In mentioning pop, another connection to Bakhtin comes to light: Alexander Kaempfe emphasizes the parallels between pop and carnival:

Auch das Selbstverständnis der zwei Lachkulturen ist ähnlich. Karneval wie Popkultur behaupten, der „gute“ Pol in einer doppelpoligen Gesellschaftsstruktur zu sein, der lachende Feind des Ernstes. Starren und Gewordenen: das Anti-Establishments. Beide Lachkulturen bescheinigen sich Fortschrittlichkeit, Jugendlichkeit und Utopie. In ihrem Anspruch gleichen sie sich noch mehr als in ihrer Wirklichkeit. (Kaempfe 146)

However, one large difference between Landshoff's novel and Bakhtin's theory is that she writes about glamorous, young people, while Bakhtin emphasizes the simple people. While in Bakhtin's theory the hierarchies and authorities become the laughing stock of the carnival, here the ambiguous and androgynous characters are seen in a more positive light than the novel's bourgeois elders such as Percy's grandfather, who is „[s]ein ganzes Leben [...] anständig. Warum nur, fragte sich Percy immer wieder verzweifelt. Sicher nur, weil ihm nichts anderes einfiel. Er merkt nicht mal, wie peinlich das ist für seine Mitmenschen, das Anständigsein.“ (DV 18). The new bohemia establishes a new lifestyle independent of bourgeois attitudes and dependent only on their own ideas and wishes. This creates a kind of utopian world, in which at least the young and glamorous can live as they wish. The emphasis of freedom in this utopian world reflects Bakhtin's description of the carnival as a “utopian

vision of the world” (Stallybrass 7), although Landshoff’s work is populated with glamorous twentysomethings rather than simple folk. Landshoff’s world, however, is not just a simple holiday and that differentiates it from Bakhtin’s ideas. It has no limits in time – it is to go on eternally, at least for the right group of people.

20 Landshoff’s own playful life as a Berlin bohémienne (which no doubt bore many similarities to her novel) was not eternal and ended in 1933 when she went into exile. Her life was to change radically. After some years of exile in several European countries she eventually emigrated to the USA in 1937, not only switching completely from German to English, but also changing her writing style from the playful pop to political propaganda literature against Nazi Germany. Gender and humor took a back seat to her political intentions which played a more important role and led to the production of three novels, several poems and radio pieces. At the same time her style became refined and more aware of stylistic subtleties.

21 After the war Landshoff returned to some of her old topics. However, even though she still dealt with subjects such as homosexuality in her work, for example in her novel *So cold the night* (1947), the tone had changed. There was less playfulness, but more stylistic and narrative subtlety and more experimentation with style, language(s) and genres. Furthermore, Landshoff became an important mentor (and writer) in the blossoming Off-Off-Broadway (OOB) of the ‘50s and ‘60s in New York and was even known as the “poet lady” von Greenwich Village” (N.N., Memoriam 8). Again she made gender a topic: “Ruth Landshoff Yorck [!] revolutionized gender-bending and sexual identity in her plays and her lifestyle, beginning as a young artist in Weimar Germany. Her work helped link the European avant-garde and OOB.” (Peculiar Works Project). She not only put young American artists in contact with her older friends in Europe, she did the same vice versa for young European writers such as Günther Grass and Uwe Johnson (Landshoff, Grass 1-6). At the same time, however, Landshoff was living under the poverty line. Although she was writing a lot, only a small amount of her work was published. Much of her writing was declined because of its progressive nature and only a few of her short stories were published in Germany and the USA, but also in other countries like Great Britain. The difficulty Landshoff had getting her work published, especially after the rise of the Nazis but also in the years after the War, goes some way to explaining why she was largely forgotten in both American and German literature.

22 Alfred Andersch, the publisher of most of her German works, wrote about her:

Übrigens schreibt unsere Dame ein wundervolles schlechtes Deutsch. Da sie nämlich seit ihrer Emigration einen Teil ihrer Dinge auf Englisch schreibt, [...] rutscht ihr manchmal die englische Grammatik in die deutsche Feder. [...] Aber ich finde, dass der leicht englische Timbre ihrer Prosa gut bekommt. Der englische Satzbau ist trocken, sanft und lustig. Wie die Prosa von Ruth Landshoff-Yorck. Die ist auf keinen Fall langweilig, sondern amüsant. Die deutsche Abneigung gegen alles Amüsante wird ihr eine Weile im Wege sein. Denn was amüsant ist, kann nicht tief sein. Meint man. (Andersch 232)

He describes her writing as funny and light whilst not missing depth, which he sees as caused by her bilingualism –ignoring the problems she had with this (“Ich leb in einer [...] nervenzerrüttenden schizophrenischen Literaturphase, schreibe Gedichte entweder deutsch oder amerikanisch. Feuillitons immer deutsch und Bücher und Erzählungen immer amerikanisch, übersetze vieles dann später von einem ins andere. [...] Ich muss leider annehmen, dass ich ein zweiseitig Charakter bin doppelzüngig, als Schaffender schizophren. Wir werden ja sehen wie das weiter geht. Ich bin etwas besorgt.“; Landshoff, unaussprechlich 6). Indeed most of the short stories are very cynical stories with fantastic elements (for example her only published anthology, in: Ruth Landshoff-Yorck: *das ungeheuer zärtlichkeit*. Frankfurt: Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt 1952).

23 While Andersch emphasizes the humor in her stories, Landshoff herself perceived the times in which she lived as anything but amusing. Even if she often drew parallels between the 1920s in Germany and the early 60s in the USA, she also saw differences:

Ruth Yorck hat einmal gesagt, daß die Künstler hier im Village das Deutschland der späten zwanziger, Anfang der dreißiger Jahre neu durchleben. Der einzige Unterschied sei, daß es uns keinen Spaß mache wie ihr damals. Und das ist sicher richtig, weil über allem eine Anspannung lagert. (Heilmeyer 81)

There was less fun to be had and the problems of the age made a strong impression on Landshoff. She wrote about the schizophrenic situation of the McCarthy era (Landshoff, Hörner) and complained about the strong conservatism in the USA (Patrick 159) and post-war Germany. These subjects did not only appear in her articles, but also often influenced her short stories – especially *The Opening Night*.

24 The English version of this short story was published 1958 – two years after the German edition. There is no clear evidence confirming which language the story was actually written in. The earlier publishing time in a German magazine suggests the German is the original and the English version is a translation; however neither blurb mentions that the story is a translation. Furthermore, Landshoff mentioned in an article that she only wrote prose in English after her emigration, while she wrote, for example, articles mostly in German and then translated them (Landshoff, unaussprechlich 6). She noted in the same article how hard it

was to get these new stories published in any language – thus the publishing date does not provide a reliable indication of the actual time frame the novel was written in, as she was keen to have her stories published in any language. This article discusses the differences between the two stories, treating them simply as two versions and not one as the original and one as the translation. The focus is centered mainly on the English version for the reason that, despite the additional ending, the German version is very similar.

25 The stories' titles have ambiguous meanings: *The Opening Night* invokes besides the literal opening of the flower, the notion of a beginning and of a (sexual) first time. It also reflects the openness of the story and its open end. The title *Durch die Blume*, on the one hand, emphasizes the way Ronny is changed “through” the flower, but also the way the characters talk at the end of the story: they talk in a (not so secret) code about sexuality and most associations with sex in the story happen through the (appearance of the) flower.

26 From its very beginning the story shows the gap between the prude and conservative surface of New England society and its true nature of hidden and suppressed sexuality and lust, as revealed by the strange flower. The special flower opens every seventh year, an event that brings the friends of the West-Morton family together in a society event celebrated proudly each time. The flower is an Arcantythian (Which is, of course, an invention of Landshoff: there is no real flower with this name), also called “flower of manhood” (Landshoff, *Opening*, 13, from here on abbreviated to ON), and had been brought back from an unknown exotic country by an ancestor decades previously. The story is told by one of the guests, a mother who is worrying about her grown-up son Ronny because she has observed, as she tells it, that her son shows an ostentatious “eagerness [...] to please his boy friends, or older men who came to call, or even, and here my heart grows faint to acknowledge such a thing, the milkman and the plumber [...]” (ON 15). Not only is Ronny’s attraction to men a problem for her - she never dares to use the word “homosexual” - but his attraction to men of a lower social class worries her especially. The mother places her hope in Janet, the daughter of the West-Mortons, that she would be the girl who would “turn out right for Ronny” (ON 14) – or, to be more explicit, who would turn Ronny “right”.

27 All in all, the mother is a classic example of an unreliable narrator: it remains unclear what the mother indeed sees and knows, and what she constructs to hide her own feelings. Not only does she show strong affection towards her own son, but her descriptions of Janet also reveal more attraction to the girl than she realizes herself: “Those pure blue eyes, that mouth of hers, longing and soft – could Janet not reach where I was shy to fathom unknown

depths? Might not her blossoming figure strike a spark from his armour of placidity?” (ON 15). Clearly, the true depths the mother does not dare to fathom are her own feelings.

28 The mother also shows some comical tendencies in her unreliability. There is, on the one hand, her continuous competition with the West-Mortons, whose pride for their flower seems ridiculous to her, because, as she points out, she has seen a cactus which blooms in red, blue and white – and is thus a true American cactus (ON 16). On the other hand, she bursts out angrily when someone dares to criticize the West-Mortons for their way of feeding the plant (they feed it with milk, but it is implied also with some smaller animals). Ronny’s mother remains unpredictable in her opinions and often defends the things she fought against a moment before – and she does the same with her own feelings.

29 Into this circle of attraction, consisting of Ronny as the object of the desire of his mother and – possibly – of Janet (who is several times described as being “devoted” to Ronny), the flower becomes the new object of everybody’s attention in the second half of the story. The flower stands out because of its exotic and unusual appearance, especially because of what it resembles: „the inside of the flower bears a resemblance to a human mouth, pink and rather fleshy“ (ON 13-14). Bakhtin emphasizes that the mouth is the “wichtigste Gesichtsteil der Groteske”, “Das groteske Gesicht läuft im Grunde auf einen aufgerissenen Mund hinaus. Alles andere ist bloß die Umrahmung dieses Mundes, dieses klaffenden und verschlingenden leiblichen Abgrunds.” (Bakhtin, Gestalt 16). In Landshoff’s novel, this accentuation is taken to its extreme in the flower: the flower consists of little else – although the mouth is also the inside of the flower and is hidden at first – until it suddenly appears when the flower opens. The similarity with genitals, especially a vagina, is unmistakable. Moreover, Janet describes the inside of the flower as similar to “a fur muff hiding the hands. And the hands making forbidden gestures nobody can see.” (ON 14). Even if hands do not play a prominent role in Bakhtin’s theories, cursing does as a form of a freer language (Bakhtin, Rabelais 383). At the same time, this quote seems to show that Janet is not as innocent as the mother had thought – Janet, who must have seen the opening at least twice before, feels scared by the flower in some way.

30 While the guests of the party celebrate inside the house until the flower is due to finally open, Ronny’s mother lures her son into the garden to give him some private time with Janet, who, at that time, was still waiting inside the house. When both women arrive in the garden, they see something unexpected:

Ronny’s face showed complete concentration, the kind last seen when he held his bottle in his loving, chubby fist. The Arcantythian was open. And I found Ronny with his mouth on the fat lips of the corolla. The long silky multi-coloured petals playing

around his face, caressing it, tickling his ears, reaching around his neck. And I saw my son's tongue flick in and out of those shiny pink depths where bees should go, not he, and the stamen responding. (ON 18-19)

One the one hand, this is a regression of Ronny to his days as Baby – on the other hand, it is an unconcealed depiction of sex – sex with a flower. That makes it unbearable for his mother: “I had never dreamed I could be that terribly shocked by my own child. Had I found him without his clothes at the sideboard in the West-Mortons’ dining room, smashing the blue china, I believe I would have been less shaken.” (ON 18) Even being naked AND smashing property of the West-Mortons would not have been as shocking for the mother as Ronny having sex with the property of the West-Mortons – which enhances the absurdity of the situation. This is further stressed by the flower appearing to be hermaphrodite with both a stamen and a calyx within the same flower, which are paralleled with genitals in their description.

31 Hermaphrodite plants are often used in literature as Achim Aurnhammer points out (Aurnhammer 177-200). But unlike the examples of Romanticism and Enlightenment he analyses, the flower here is not a metaphor for uniting or harmonizing the sexes – the flower is pure and obtrusive sex. The flower is omnivorous, but also omnisexual and “omni-sex” – its genitals and its desire are so blatant that there is nothing more to the flower – and that makes it quite unappealing. It has no eyes, makes no gestures - it is just a mixture of mouth, genitals and plant parts. Here Bakhtin's theory seems itself stretched to its maximum: while Bakhtin only talks about sexual elements in the carnival, the flower here seems to represent everything sexual in one body. It is “a mobile and hybrid creature, disproportionate, exorbitant, outgrowing all limits, obscenely decentred and off-balance, a figural and symbolic resource for parodic exaggeration”, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White describe the characteristics of the grotesque body (9), – only this body is not human, but the body of a plant. The plant is no longer amusing, but simply dangerous for the protagonists.

32 Ronny tries to stop this kind of “French kissing foreplay” when he notices the presence of his mother and attempts to draw back, but the flower does not want him to leave:

He attempted to loosen his lips but they were caught and held fast, and I saw agony in his eyes There was rustling of [...] a silk gown, Janet had joined us. Her voice was rough hoarse, when she called but once, ‘Ronnie’ [sic!]. The petals, at this sound, gathered around my boy's face and hid what he was doing in a dark and furry embrace. The girl stood still like a statue. (ON 19)

Before the rest of the party can approach, Janet suddenly starts to fight with the flower and “her fingers tore and scratched at the furry muff, the protective outer petals gave way, the blossom opened reluctantly again, and at last [Ronny] was free.” (ON 19) None of the guests

notices what has taken place and while Janet and Ronny stand apart from the others, the flower starts to transform: “the pink lips of the Arcantythian bent upwards at the corners as in a smile, and I watched the mouth, slowly, stickily, exclude clear drops of moisture, nectar of gods.” (ON 19) The description goes on:

The crowd stood silent. By now the broad-faced blossom was spitting dew drops in quick succession, hitting some of the bystanders. The luscious lips of the flower, gleaming with moisture, trembling, pulsating, were crying, shedding tears. [...] And then, before our very eyes, the circle was completed. The generous open face of the flower faded, wilted. The glorious petals drooped and shrivelled and dropped. And finally, inside wet bits of fur, the tiny heaps of ashes. (ON 19-20)

The scene depicted here is an explicit portrayal of an orgasm and an ejaculation. This sexual outburst occurs within the crowd; furthermore, the flower actually involves the surrounding persons by ejaculating/ spitting on them. The flower subsequently turns to ashes, as if it had never existed. To the West-Mortons' utmost anger, they are unable to collect any semen to reproduce the plant.

33 But what happens to Ronny? He suddenly appears to have changed: “[he] asked like a dreamer for her [Janet’s] hand. He pleaded, he offered no price, only himself, dejected, pitiful. And I [Ronny’s mother] could not bear the expression on Janet’s face when she said, ‘No. No, Ronny. No.’” (ON 19). Janet now seems different, almost disgusted by Ronny, who is suddenly infected with something: a lust for women. Obviously the flower was not infertile after all: it was able to impregnate people with its lust, but it acted brutally in doing so. The ending is ambiguous: “Janet and Ronny were still standing at the dwarf pears, and again I could not see his face. His head was enclosed by Janet’s long moonlit hands and overhung by her thick brown hair. I wonder if the Arcantythian will ever bloom again.” (ON 20) Janet did not reject Ronny as it had previously seemed – rather she appears to have transformed into the flower, her hands explicitly resembling the petals of the flower, she holds Ronny as the flower did before. As the flower lured animals into its calyx (ON 16), so Janet seems to have caught Ronny. The unanswered question is what Janet is going to do with him: is she going to kiss him, to marry him or to eat him – or maybe all at once?

34 Suddenly Ronny is full of devotion to Janet, while she appears to be the strong one: she had combated the flower and thus seems to have achieved the dominant position. Not that this implies that the sexes have changed simply because of that new positions – rather that the flower appears to have represented a turning point, changing people’s behavior towards the other sex.

35 While the flower seems to have had some influence on the people of this world, this also marks a large departure from Bakhtin's theories: The story does not take place in a carnival world, it is neither a special holiday nor an alternative world. It is the conservative, puritan world of New England, a world interlaced with materialism and sexual suppression – however the world itself is not changed. In its ejaculation, the flower seems to be mocking society, to be cursing it - literally spitting on it. However, the flower then collapses and falls to ashes and it remains uncertain whether it will ever bloom again. Where the story diverges most from Bakhtin's ideas is that the flower had been – literally and metaphorically – planted in good soil. It is the society that is problematic, it “produced” and owns the flower.

36 There is some tension created between the mouth of the flower and the eyes of the characters in the story. It is important to note where the characters look: the mother watches her son, Janet watches Ronny and both watch Ronny kissing the plant – which is nearly the only physical contact to take place (except for at the very end; when Janet's hands around Ronny's head suddenly remind the reader of the flower's mouth). While the mouth in Bakhtin's theory represents the freedom of the Grotesque, the constant gazing (especially at the flower's sexual act) shows the distance of the society. The characters remain at a distance, and even if they are participants in their impure world, they hardly dirty their hands. Moreover, the spitting becomes an act of transgression: it involves the people in the sexual act and does not give them a chance to flee.

37 While the English version ends with a narrative zoom onto Janet's hands around Ronny's head, this is not the case in the German version. While there are otherwise only small differences between the two versions, the German edition has an additional ending, going on after the zoom to Janet and Ronny:

Ronny machte sich los, stand gerade und lachte beglückt. Ich hörte wie sie sagte: “Oh, ja, Ronny. Natürlich. Wenn einer eine Blume so küssen kann, dann kann er auch ein Mädchen lieben.“ Mein Sohn sah lächelnd in ihr Gesicht und fragte: “Wirst du mich so halten können wie die Arcanthythia?“ [...] “Oh ja”, sagte sie. “Und ich werde sehr aufpassen betreffend halboffener Knospen und verschlossener Blüten. Ich laß keine nah an dich heran, verlaß dich darauf.“ Ich gab den beiden heimlich meinen Segen. Und trat dann wie von ungefähr dazu und fragte: “Glaubt ihr, daß die Arcanthythia je wieder blühen wird?“ “In sieben Jahren kann viel geschehen“, sagte Ronny. “Wer weiß.“ Und Janet sagte träumerisch: “Wenn ich eine kleine Tochter bekomme, nenne ich sie nach einer Blume.“ “Selbstverständlich“, sagte Ronny. “Wir nennen sie Rose. Oder Margerite.“ Da wußte ich, daß alles in Ordnung war.

This terribly happy ending can be read in two ways. On the one hand, it is reminiscent of the artificial happy endings in melodramas, where a happy ending is required, however implausible it may seem in relation to the developments in the story before. This reading is

plausible, because an important part is missing in the German version: the spitting. Here the flower simply collapses after blooming - having no orgasm-like outbreak or associated rebellion against society. This can lead us to postulate that Landshoff was perhaps forced to write another ending to make the story more acceptable, which would demonstrate how negative the reception of grotesque and experimental writings in post-war Germany had been. It might be that the story itself, due to its topics of incest and homosexuality, was considered so scandalous that it had to be moderated with this alternative ending.

38 However there is another possible interpretation: the happy ending is not so happy after all. Janet and Ronny seem to behave like sleep walking and the dialogue is written in the style of a text decades older. The flower is omnipresent in their words, they cannot talk to each other without the flower – the flower is still there, as a third partner. It will even become a part of their family, becoming the godmother/ godfather, at least in name, of their child. What is more, the mother is as omnipresent as the flower. She is constantly near the couple and will probably never leave them – as if she were obsessed with them both. The dialogues themselves are quite funny: they suddenly obscure all the sexual openness which had appeared before in conventional words. Although everybody knows from the earlier story what is actually meant, this is hidden prudishly again. Not only does this dialogue itself seem strange, it is made stranger still by the voice of the mother constantly slipping into a conversation which should be exclusively between the two lovers. Thus in the discourse of the German version there appears to be an internal rebellion against the pure meaning of the words by creating a strangeness in them.

39 The suddenness of the happy ending is also absurd: No explanation is provided for the characters' sudden changes of mind. Janet holds Ronny as if he were prey, but subsequently wishes to be held like that herself. All of this happens within the context of marriage and partnership, which reveals much black humor. After everything the flower had done, Janet's wish to be held like it or to be kissed like Ronny had kissed the flower seems simply absurd. Their "love" is planted in the same strange soil as the flower was and the happy ending comes so suddenly and is so improbable and unexplained, that it could be ironic and appears rebellious in its indecisiveness.

40 There is no reason given by the magazines for the different versions. *The London Magazine*, was at that time edited by John Hartley, who was always trying to encourage experimental writing (c.f. *The London Magazine*). The German magazine *Texte und Zeichen* and its editor Andersch also "promoted the avantgarde revival" (Parker 163) and the magazine was said to be – compared with other German literary magazines – to have

“extremsten Charakter” (Kasack). This description is from a review of Arno Schmidt’s novel *Seelandschaft mit Pocahontas*, a novel which had been published in the first issue of *Texte und Zeichen* and caused a scandal, including a notification, due to accusations it would be pornographic and blasphemous. Thus, despite *Texte und Zeichen* efforts to be as avant-garde as possible, it might be that a less controversial ending to the novel was required to reconcile readers and prevent possible new notifications. This is speculation; however the text has a kind of grotesque form, with unclear versions and no distinct original.

41 But the openness relating to sexuality and its emphasis were handled differently than in the works of the Weimar years: in *Die Vielen und der Eine* a new life was celebrated, juggling roles of gender and sexuality. Everything was fashion and costume, but also amusing and easy-going, mocking only the strictness of the – literally and metaphorically – old-fashioned (like Percy’s grandfather). In Landshoff’s later works this happiness had faded. The rest of it seems constrained by a restrictive surrounding – which might be a reason for the use of the fantastic to make everything sexual more tolerable.

42 This is most visible in the treatment of homosexuality: while in *Die Vielen und der Eine* the homosexual couple is described as positively as the heterosexual couples, in *The Opening Night* homosexuality is described by the anxious mother as dark and strange. The easy-going lightness is replaced with a gloomy strictness, although it is interwoven with black humor. Even if gender and sexuality are no longer treated as fluid and borderless, they are still regarded in the later stories with an ironic smile. The bourgeois society, rejecting everything unknown, is again the subject of mockery – only that in the later works no more exceptions are possible: there are no more young heroes living beyond conventions.

43 Neither work creates a complete “Grotesque of gender”, but both remain close to Bakhtin’s ideas in their own distinct way. *Die Vielen und der Eine* celebrates openness in every possible respect, partially as a notion of openness of the body – an idea which is reflected in Bakhtin’s theories, albeit without the role of gender. But while Landshoff’s writings focus on a universal openness of the body, to the extent that the body is so open it is no longer male, female or even hermaphroditic, they also become somehow vague by not providing any distinct descriptions. This vagueness collides with the variegation and concreteness explicated in Bakhtin’s theory, yet also widens it to include notions of eternalness and universality.

44 The short story *The Opening Night/ Durch die Blume*, is similar in a different way: the description of the flower is very analog to Bakhtin, though it exaggerates the grotesque aspects and becomes thus hard to withstand. The flower is depicted extremely graphically and

is also the only body described in such way, but in the end it dies or at least vanishes, but leaves the world partially transformed – as if at least something grotesque survived.

45 Despite the humor of the '20s being different to that of the '50s, it can be seen that Landshoff did not lose her wit – and that it was more than a refuge. Ranging from sailors to sexual flowers, her ways of writing about gender had undergone a clear transition from writing with an easygoing freedom to using very physical and often vulgar descriptions, from a utopian vision to a nearly nightmarish one. However, gender remained one of the main subjects in her works. Bakhtin's theory becomes very helpful in the examination of the portrayal of gender when it is based on ideas of transgression, even if Landshoff sometimes transcends or undermines such ideas in her works. Thus, while Landshoff's works can be elucidated with Bakhtin's theories, an interpretation limited to this would not be complete, but her works can also help to broaden the scope of Bakhtin's theories to cover aspects of gender.

Works Cited

- Andersch, Alfred. "Vor allem kleine Feuer". *Ruth Landshoff-Yorck, Karl Otten, Philipp Keller und andere. Literatur zwischen Wilhelminismus und Nachkriegszeit*. Ed. Gregor Ackermann et. al.. Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag 2002, 231-232.
- Aurnhammer, Achim. *Androgynie. Studien zu einem Motiv in der europäischen Literatur*. Köln: Böhlau, 1986.
- Bakhtin, Michael. "Die groteske Gestalt des Leibes". *Literatur und Karneval. Zur Romantheorie und Lachkultur. Aus dem Russischen übersetzt und mit einem Nachwort von Alexander Kaempfe*. Michael Bakhtin. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1969. 15-23.
- . "Der Karneval und die Karnevalisierung der Literatur". *Literatur und Karneval. Zur Romantheorie und Lachkultur. Aus dem Russischen übersetzt und mit einem Nachwort von Alexander Kaempfe*. Mikhail Bakhtin. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1969. 47-60.
- . "Karnevalistisches bei Dostojewskij". *Literatur und Karneval. Zur Romantheorie und Lachkultur. Aus dem Russischen übersetzt und mit einem Nachwort von Alexander Kaempfe*. Mikhail Bakhtin. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1969, 61-85.
- . *Rabelais und seine Welt. Volkskultur als Gegenkultur. Herausgegeben und mit einem Vorwort versehen von Renate Lachmann*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1995.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Diedrichsen, Diedrich. *Der lange Weg nach Mitte. Der Sound und die Stadt*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1999.
- Fell, Karolina Dorothea. *Kalkuliertes Abenteuer. Reiseberichte deutschsprachiger Frauen 1920 – 1945*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998.
- Heilmeyer, Jens, Fröhlich, Pea. *Now. Theater der Erfahrung*. Köln: Schauburg, 1971.
- Kaempfe, Alexander. "Die Funktion der sowjetischen Literaturtheorie". *Literatur und Karneval. Zur Romantheorie und Lachkultur. Aus dem Russischen übersetzt und mit einem Nachwort von Alexander Kaempfe*. Mikhail Bakhtin. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1969. 133-148.
- Kasack, Hermann. "Gutachten". July 1956. 6 October 2011 .
- Kessemeier, Gesa. *Sportlich, sachlich, männlich. Das Bild der ‚Neuen Frau‘ in den Zwanziger Jahren. Zur Konstruktion geschlechtsspezifischer Körperbilder in der Mode der Jahre 1920 bis 1929*. Dortmund: Ed. Ebersbach, 2000.
- Koschorke, Albrecht. "Die Männer und die Moderne". *Der Blick vom Wolkenkratzer. Avantgarde – Avantgardekritik – Avantgardeforschung*. Ed. Wolfgang Asholt, and Walter Fähnders: Amsterdam: Rodolphi 1999. 141-162

Landshoff-Yorck, Ruth. *das ungeheuer zärtlichkeit*. Frankfurt: Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt, 1952.

---. *Die Vielen und der Eine*, Berlin: Aviva Verlag, 2001.

---. "Durch die Blume", in: *Texte und Zeichen. Eine literarische Zeitschrift* 4 (1956). 385-391.

---. "Ganz deutlich kleine Hörner", in: *Frankfurter Hefte* 9 (1954). 568-570

---. *Grass on the other side of the fence*, from the Ruth Landshoff-Yorck Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University.

---. *unaussprechlich*, from the Ruth Landshoff-Yorck Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University.

N.N.. "In Memoriam Ruth Landshoff-Yorck". *Aufbau* (28.1.1966). 8.

Parker, Stephen et.al. *The modern restoration: re-thinking German literary history 1930 – 1960*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006.

Patrick. Robert. *Temple Slave*. New York: Hard Candy, 1998.

Peculiar Works Project. Ed. Ralph Lewis. 6 October 2011 .

Pendl, Christine. "Rut Landshoff – Ruth L. Yorck – Ruth Landshoff-Yorck. Exilantin zwischen neuer und alter Heimat". *Ruth Landshoff-Yorck, Karl Otten, Philipp Keller und andere. Literatur zwischen Wilhelminismus und Nachkriegszeit*. Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag 2002. Ed. Gregor Ackermann et.al. 305-323.

Schoppmann, Claudia. "Ruth Landshoff-Yorck. Porträt". *Im Fluchtgepäck die Sprache: Deutschsprachige Schriftstellerinnen im Exil*. Ed. Claudia Schoppmann. Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1991. 63-69.

Stallybrass, Peter, and White, Allon. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

The London Magazine. 6 October 2011 .

Yorck, Ruth. "The Opening Night". *The London Magazine* (1958). 13-20.

“More Than Just Another Dumb Blonde Joke”: Humor and Gender in Anita Loos’s Novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and Howard Hawks’s Film Adaptation

By Eduard Andreas Lerperger, University of Salzburg, Austria

Abstract:

Humor is a central element, if not the cornerstone, of both Anita Loos' highly humorous, satirical novel *Gentlemen prefer Blondes* and Howard Hawkes' 1953 film adaptation of the same name which stars Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell. Yet Loos' novel and the film use very different forms and registers of humor in order to achieve very different aims. The 1925 novel reads like a guidebook to the liberated and emancipated lifestyle of the 1920s flapper and provides the reader with an unadorned, strongly satirical view of Western culture. The humor of the film adaptation is of a more situational kind and relies heavily on slapstick. This essay aims to compare and contrast the kinds of humor employed by both novel and film version with a special focus on the relationship of the two main characters, Lorelei and Dorothy. It examines the way in which male and female characters are portrayed in general and investigates how humor and satire is used in order to challenge the firm order of class and society. It is the aim of this essay to draw a clear, differentiated image of these two very distinct works. Furthermore, this analysis tries to find possible reasons for the loss in translation from book to film as well as to find examples where critical themes and satire can still be found but in another form.

1 Humor is a central element, if not the cornerstone, of both Anita Loos' highly humorous, satirical novel *Gentlemen prefer Blondes* and Howard Hawkes' 1953 film adaptation of the same name which stars Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell. In the introduction to her book on women's humor and American culture Nancy A. Walker summarizes the role of the humorist as one who is at "odds with the publicly espoused values of the culture, overturning its sacred cows" (9) and addresses the even more difficult situation for women humorists who have to "break out of the passive, subordinate position." (Walker: 9) Walker sees the role of the female humorist as one who has to "confront and subvert the very power that keeps women powerless, and at the same time to risk alienating those upon whom women are dependent for economic survival. The delicate balance between power and powerlessness informs the themes and forms of women's humorous writing." (Walker: 9) A theme that also very much applies to the poor, uneducated, lower class heroines of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Despite their background, Lorelei and Dorothy enter into the spheres of upper class American and European society and threaten the established order and stability of class and society. This constant is the only common ground in terms of humor between Anita Loos's novel and the 1953 film adaptation as both works use very different forms and

registers of humor in order to achieve very different aims. The 1925 novel reads like a guidebook to the liberated and emancipated lifestyle of the 1920s flapper and provides the reader with an unadorned, strongly satirical view of Western culture through the eyes of the seemingly naive protagonist and narrator Lorelei Lee. In contrast, the humor of the film adaptation is of a more situational and slapstick kind and the movie "fits into the clearly defined and theorized category of the Hollywood musical." (Hegeman: 526) This essay aims to compare and contrast the kinds of humor employed in both versions with a special focus on the relationship of the two main characters, Lorelei and Dorothy. It examines the ways in which male and female characters are portrayed in general and investigates how humor and satire is used in order to challenge the firm order of class and society. It is the aim of this essay to draw a clear, differentiated image of these two very distinct works. This seems to be a worthwhile effort, especially since there is according to Susan Hegeman "almost no recent criticism about the book on which the film was based," (Hegeman: 526) the essay by Hegeman being one of the few exceptions to this case. A comparative and contrasting approach of both the book and the film seems particularly interesting as there has been very little research in this direction and also Hegeman's essay deals only partly with this topic. Furthermore, this analysis tries to find possible reasons for this loss in translation as well as to find examples where critical themes and satire can still be found but in another form, due to the "transcription" from the medium book to the medium film. A distinct point of interest in this will be the 1949 musical *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* from which the film draws many elements as well as its major songs and the genre of Musical Comedy itself.

2 In the November of 1925 Anita Loos's novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, previously serialized in the *Bazaar* magazine, was published in a small edition and was sold out overnight. Three more printings were released before the end of the year, which also sold out. (Carey: 95) "Blondes didn't need critical praise to become the surprise best-seller of 1925," Gary Carey states in his definitive biography of Anita Loos: "It was one of those books that sold itself through word of mouth, and the word was good along every avenue of American life. Lorelei's diary made a hit with those who read nothing but light fiction as well as with James Joyce, whose failing eyesight made him highly selective about what he read. Anita was told that her book was one of the few he chose from the list of current fiction. *Blondes* was enthusiastically endorsed by the literati. Anita received notes of appreciation from William Faulkner and Aldous Huxley. Novelist, photographer; and music critic Carl Van Vechten proclaimed the book 'a work of art'. And George Santayana [...] praised *Blondes* only half-jestingly as 'a great work of philosophy'". (Carey: 98) T.E. Blom, an important scholar on the

novel “sees Lorelei as an amalgam of characters from Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Henry James, and describes *Blondes* as a picaresque, as a Bildungsroman, and finally ‘a classic American satire’.” (qdt. in Hegeman: 526)

3 What made the novel so unusual and outstanding that it received this much praise and fame? Why is it that nowadays the title is irrevocably linked to the 1953 film version with Marilyn Monroe? Is it, as Susan Hegeman states, that “*Blondes*’s critical reputation as a literary work may be marred for some by its fame as the basis of the popular stage musical starring Carol Channing and the 1953 Howard Hawks musical film starring Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell”? (Hegeman: 525)

4 Anita Loos's novel follows the story of the naive and, in the widest sense, uneducated Lorelei Lee who tells of her life as a "professional lady", the book's subtitle, through the ingenious literary device of diary-form entries. Through this diary the reader is offered a very satirical and often critical view of the 1920s – either through Lorelei's naive impressions and observations or through more ironical comments by Dorothy. Very few of these elements of parody remain in the 1953 film adaptation by Howard Hawks and as already stated – the genre changed from satire to musical comedy. The era of the film seems unspecified and greater emphasis has been laid on the relationship between Lorelei and Dorothy. The film takes further liberties from the source material – a prime example would be the trip through Europe that includes stops in London, Paris, Munich and Vienna in the book and is reduced to a cruise across the Atlantic and a visit to Paris in the movie.

Humor

5 Although both the novel and the film adaptation make use of humor as it is a central element, they make use of very different registers and styles of humor. Hegeman describes "Loos's comical use of illiteracies (misspellings, bad grammar misusages) [...] akin to [Gertrude] Stein's stylistic experiments" (Hegeman: 527) and David Tracy sees these factors as a form of vernacular humor: "A key aspect of this humor [being] the *appeal* of the personas even as they reveal themselves to be uneducated, or at least unlettered, in comparison to the reader – and indeed their ability to stand in for the reader by representing a universalized foolishness and vanity." (Tracy: 126) Tracy finds connections to "a group [...] referred to as the 'literary humorists' or the 'misspellers' [who] publish[ed] from the 1860s to the 1880s. These writers [...] wrote mock essays, letters and dramatic monologues in a style replete with phonetic, and usually dialect-associated, misspellings, misquotations and malapropisms emphasizing the persona's lack of education and understanding." (124) On the other hand he

also argues that the "vernacular humor in Loos's writing of Lorelei Lee transforms under the pressure of increasing focus in U.S. mass culture on the question of becoming cultured." (Tracy, 127) *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* itself made fun of this urge to become cultivated and the fear of "cultural degeneration but also seemed to fuel it: Loos' novel became a bestseller, [...], while other [...] experimental and serious works struggled to gain a readership." (Currell: 69) While this essay does not necessarily attribute higher cultural value to serious and "high brow" literature it is certainly true that the serialization of Loos's novel in the esteemed *Bazaar* magazine led to a debate on its literary and humorous value. Laurie J.C. Cella also examined the humor in Lorelei's grammatical mistakes and the novel's satire, yet she interprets them in a radically different way to Tracy. For Cella Lorelei's "grammatical error[s] [are] a purposeful misnomer that elicits more than just another dumb blonde joke." (48) Furthermore, she sees more than just "unintentional comedy" (Cella: 48). For her, Loos uses this particular style in order "to put her readers in a position of false superiority comparable to Lorelei's hapless suitors." (Cella: 48) This strengthens the theory that Lorelei is actually subverting established patriarchal systems. This argument is also discussed by Nancy A. Walker who seems certain of Lorelei's hidden intellect as she characterizes her as a "dumb blonde [...] who is not so dumb after all, but uses the assets she has to turn matters to her own advantage, all the while laughing at the men who perceive her as stupid." (11 - 12) *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* did not establish the "dumb blonde" stereotype (Walker: 92) as an end in itself. Rather Lorelei's naive comments are used as a "vehicle for [...] Loos's social satire." (Walker: 93) Lorelei and Dorothy face both socioeconomic as well as cultural injustice because of their gender – they are exploited and marginalized by the patriarchal power around them. (Fraser: 16). Yet Lorelei is able to escape this exploitation by putting emphasis on the constructed, marginalized image of the "dumb blonde". Thereby she is able to turn the tables and exploit men such as Gus Eisman or Henry Spoffard. Although this can also be observed in the film, this subversion of patriarchal society and the subsequent redistribution of economical goods come to a halt when the film's Lorelei decides to marry Gus Esmond in order to enable a Hollywood happy ending.

6 There is also a great variation in the critical potential of the forms of humor employed by novel and film. The often biting social and cultural satire chosen by Loos in order to criticize Western culture cannot be matched in its critical potential by the slapstick episodes in the film adaptation. This is not too say that slapstick in general cannot be socially critical – Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* is the best example that it can indeed – yet the only deeper underlying theme in the film is the unity of Lorelei and Dorothy and their rejection of

patriarchal structures. This theme is ultimately undermined by the very conventional Hollywood ending which reinforces these patriarchal patterns once again. Lorelei's subversion of the male dominated culture is short-lived in the film.

7 Aim and target of humor also differ greatly between the novel and the film adaptation. The novel version seems much more in favor of equality as Europeans of both genders are the target of Lorelei's and Dorothy's pranks and jokes. The film adaptation offers a much stronger gender contrast insofar as the two female main characters are more strongly united in order to defy masculine patriarchy with their ridicule. Lorelei and Dorothy are not part of the high and wealthy society they consort with and they do not care about this fact, they "create a carnival wherever they go. They create havoc; they produce a whirlwind of intense experience which leaves the lives of others deeply changed even as their own lives remain untouched. (Barreca: xv) Lorelei and Dorothy often converse with European aristocrats or the wealthy business tycoons as if they were equals and often they create scenes in which they outsmart them or they upset the whole order of society: "Dorothy said by the time the party got into swing, anyone would have to be a genius if he could tell whether he belonged to the Racquet Club, the Silver Spray Social Club, or the Knights of Pythias" (Loos: 104-5). The humor of this passage underscores rather than undermines the socially disruptive nature of Loos's characters. "You can't tell the men apart; they themselves cannot distinguish one another by rank, ethnicity, or social standing." (Barreca: xiv)

8 Lorelei's and Dorothy's relationship with the circles and societies they enter into is disruptive, as they are difficult to define in terms of social class. They "are unassimilable and yet, paradoxically, they spend Loos's two novels joyfully and wholly infiltrating the homes of the ruling class. They embrace, and thereby parody and undermine, the rituals of the powerful." (Barreca: xiii) Although this aspect is clearly emphasized in the novel and is still a topic in the movie, the difference of social rank seems to be more downplayed and is more a question whether a person is wealthy or not. It is also notable that in the film, Lorelei and Dorothy are considerate of their name and reputation, and the private detective Ernie Malone is seen as a threat who might unearth Lorelei's infidelity. In the book, on the other hand, Dorothy remarks to Lady Beekman: "Lady you could no more ruin my girl friends reputation than you could sink the Jewish fleet," (Loos: 58) thereby stating a general non-interest in their reputations.

9 Yet while the two impoverished Arkansas (show-)girls defy the authority of both European aristocracy and American business tycoon's in the film adaptation as well as in the novel, ultimately the message of the 1925 novel proves to be more radical and modern in

comparison to the more conventional Hollywood ending of Howard Hawks's movie. In the novel Lorelei decides to marry the devout Christian Henry Spoffard, who is sure to guarantee her personal freedom through his prosperity. By continuing to perform the stereotype of the "dumb blonde" Lorelei is able to ensure the continuous redistribution of economic wealth. This paradoxically assures her a freedom that is virtually on the same level as before her wedding, as Spoffard is deceived by Lorelei. It thus ends on a much more subversive note than the film in which Lorelei decides to marry Gus Esmond out of love and therefore abdicates from her liberated, male-defying lifestyle and chooses to adhere to the established moral values of the male dominated 1950s, which confirms both the established norms of the Hollywood happy ending and the Hollywood musical.

Comparing novel and film - a tale of two Loreleis

10 It is safe to assume that the title *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is nowadays more strongly connected with the film adaptation and Marilyn Monroe than with the Roaring Twenties and the novel. "Anita Loos's [...] novel [...] has been all but eclipsed by the voluptuous shadow of Marilyn Monroe." (Frost: 291) This statement may be true and any given text would have problems in competing with the iconic Hollywood sex bomb that is Marilyn Monroe, yet at the same time "few popular novels generated as much attention" (Frost: 291) as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. The novel "was adapted to nearly every medium imaginable – magazine, stage play, silent film, musical, sound film, comic strip, dress fabric, and wallpaper" (Frost: 291) and still it is the 1953 movie that remains in the conscience of the general public. That there could not be a more direct translation from novel to film is highly puzzling considering that Loos was a screenwriter herself and that her novel "is fashioned from a convergence of literature and film." (Frost: 291) Yet, the failure of direct translation is probably the fate of most adaptations, especially of source texts that deal with a surplus of character thought and a strong narrative voice as is the case with Loos's novel. Linda Hutcheon points this out in her *Theory of Adaptation*: "Movies are good at action; they're not good at reflective thought or conceptual thinking" (57) and also harkens back to Bertold Brecht who claimed "that the film demands external action and not introspective psychology." (Hutcheon: 57) The idea of a direct translation from novel to film in itself is problematic as well since "every reading of a literary text is a highly individual act of cognition and interpretation." (McFarlane: 15)

11 Still, the loss of Lorelei's narrative voice is mourned by critic Laura Frost who points out that most of the "novel's superficial signifiers (champagne, diamonds, and dancing vamps)

could be captured on film [...], its most important characteristic, its voice, was paradoxically silenced with the coming of the sound film." (Frost: 291)

12 In terms of setting and locations Anita Loos's book could almost be considered as a sort of travel guide since a large portion of it features a journey from New York to Europe, with stops in London, Paris, Munich and Vienna. Always included in this narration are insightful comments on the land and its people, always from Lorelei's very unique perspective, which sheds a satirical light on the Europe of the 1920s. These accounts have been reduced to a great amount in the 1949 musical and consequently in the movie version as well. The reason for this may have partly been that a time-dependent medium such as the musical also required a reduced number of different locations and places in order to be better approachable by the viewers and to offer a better pacing. Especially in consideration to the fact that the original musical version received unfavorable reviews: "Channing [as Lorelei] was a sensation, and there was praise and applause for score, sets, costumes, and direction. Only the book was found wanting. The chief problem was the end of the first act, so wordy it slowed down the momentum until the second act was too far under way." (Carey: 229)

13 This leaves the question why of all the locations in the novel Paris was chosen to remain in the adaptation. A feasible explanation can be found in post World War II politics and culture. Munich and Vienna had certainly lost some of their touristic values and cultural connotations. Vienna served as a better setting for dark and somber espionage thrillers like Graham Greene's *The Third Man* (1949) than for lighthearted comedies. Although these connotations did not apply to London, its prestige and rank as a city of world-rank did certainly suffer after the end of the war. Unaffected by all of this was Paris, still considered the city of love, arts and culture – a plethora of connotations that are applied to this city to this very day.

14 The novel's setting can distinctively be identified as the era of the 1920s. The reader can deduce this even though Loos does not provide a specific year. The period can be identified through the dropping of names from that period – for instance Charlie Chaplin, H.L. Mencken (a personal friend of Anita Loos) or Sigmund Freud – or by allusion to topics of the era such as in the reference to the "bolshevicks". (Loos: 8) These factors do not occur in the movie adaptation and there may be a number of reasons for this decision. It is very possible that the movie did not want to address problems like communism, due to the Cold War and the Red Scare in the 1950s. Another viable explanation might be that it did not want to relate to specific topics and the style of the 1920s in order to give the viewers something they could better relate to than having it set thirty years ago. The motives behind an update

are quite obvious though as "the 'movement of proximation' bring[s] it closer to the audience's frame of reference in temporal, geographic, [and] social terms." (Sanders: 21)



Fig. 1.

15 When we want to compare Lorelei Lee from the book with the one from the movie version in terms of appearance we have to do this with the help of the illustrations from the *Bazaar* edition- since her looks, besides that she is a blonde, are never directly stated. This is quite a sharp contrast to the obvious attractiveness of Marilyn Monroe in the 1953 movie version. The looks of the two Loreleis are not the only contrast we find if we compare the book's slender, big eyed, short haired flapper version to the "buxom, glittery" (Hegeman: 547) Hollywood sex bomb variety of the movie. "In the illustrations for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* by Ralph Barton, Lorelei and Dorothy wear the fashionable tight cloche hats and short skirts that complement their willowy figures, big eyes, "bee-stung" lips, and coltish legs. Scandalously baring the knees, the style otherwise deliberately de-emphasized the traditional marker of feminine beauty, including long hair, the high forehead, and the curves of the mature female body." (Hegeman: 536)

16 Hegeman's quote and the illustration describe the typical attire and looks of the liberated 1920s flapper. As daring and chic this haute couture must have been in the 1920s it still stands in contrast to the more revealing, flashy and feminine dresses of the movie version, especially their blazing costumes "covered with spangles, topped with feathers" (Rosenbaum: 94) Lorelei and Dorothy wear in the opening number "We're just Two Little Girls from Little Rock." The musical version falls right in between novel and film adaptation,

as it was released in 1949, well after the novel but still a few years before the movie. From a look at Carol Channing's portrayal and style we can discern that it sways more to the flapper version than to the Hollywood sex bomb. This tells us that the re-invention of Lorelei was conceived in the movie version and alterations in form and place can be attributed to the change from diary narrative to that of the musical. This denotes a paradigm shift of the way women are perceived in movies – from the "new woman", the independent but 'simple' flapper of the post World War I era to the less "'dangerous' and ultimately more 'tame' post World War II sex bomb.

17 Although both Lorelei's share common characteristics, they are very different when it comes to details. The novel's Lorelei has to take strong measures and force in order to liberate herself from the rule of her father – she shoots her boss Mr. Jennings in Little Rock to set off the events that eventually make her a "professional lady" in New York. While the movie's Lorelei does not suffer from these restraints, she is ultimately presented as a more obedient and weaker character. She lets moralistic values be imposed upon herself as she marries Gus Esmond out of a sense of love and attachment even though there is no real implication of a romance between the two and it is not clear if Gus marries her because of her dumb blonde image or out of love. Her counterpart from the novel stays pragmatic to the very end by marrying Henry Spoffard to further her standard of living and her prestige, so she ultimately is able to continue her way of life.

18 While we know the thoughts and ideas, but not the looks of the novel's Lorelei this phenomenon is directly reversed with the movie's Lorelei where the viewer knows her appearance but only gets short glimpses of her thoughts through visual hints, as in the scene on the ocean liner where Lorelei sees Piggy's head as a diamond. It might be true that for characters in musicals their "unverbalized subconscious can be likened to their music" (Hutcheon: 60) but in this regard songs such as "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" and "When Love Goes Wrong" do not offer too much input in regards to characterization. So in terms of history and psychology the Lorelei of the movie is a blank page to the reader and she can only be characterized in terms of her actions, often sly and calculated – very similar to Lorelei in the novel. The other important component is her portrayal by Marilyn Monroe, whose star personality itself rouses connotations of the "dumb blonde per excellence" for which Monroe was often typecast and through which she became a world famous actor. This dualism of simplicity and calculation is a clearly paradoxical phenomenon that has been perceived by critics like Richard Dyer in *Stars* as "incoherence at the very heart of the film, in the figure of Lorelei as played by Monroe: 'a quite massive disjunction' between the

innocence of Monroe's image and the calculation of Lorelei's character: "This is not a question of Lorelei/Monroe being one thing one moment and another the next, but of her being simultaneously polar opposites." (qtd. in Rosenbaum: 96)

19 A calculating, scheming personality can very well be attributed to the novel's Lorelei as the following episode shows: "[...]a gentlemen who has a friendly interest in educating a girl like Gus Eisman would want her to have the biggest square cut diamond in New York. I mean I must say I was quite disappointed when he came to the apartment with a little thing you could hardly see. So I told him I thought it was quite cute, but I had quite a headache and I had better stay in a dark room all day and I told him I would see him the next day, perhaps." (Loos: 7) Her defining qualities seem to be her simple-mindedness, expressed through her "comical use of illiteracies (misspellings, bad grammar, misusages), her repetition of words, her simple diction," (Hegeman: 527) and her very predetermined, simple view of the world: "But the only Greek I know is a Greek gentlemen by the name of Mr. Georgopolis, [...] [who] is also quite cultured, as I know quite a few gentlemen who can speak to a waiter in French but Mr. Georgopolis can also speak to a waiter in Greek which very few gentlemen seem to be able to do." (Loos: 12)

20 What is generally seen as the most defining motif in the character of Lorelei and which is featured strongly in both the novel and the film adaptation is the critique of the excess of capitalism and consumerism: "The men who perpetually orbit around Lorelei and Dorothy have two major problems: They have too much money in their bank accounts and too much time on their hands. Lorelei and Dorothy are able to solve both their problems at once. The two women soak up excess time and money by being excessive themselves – by embodying excess." (Barreca: xii) As well as criticism on capitalism through the means of "economic fetish objects." (Hegeman: 548) This criticism on capitalism led to an academic comparison of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* with *The Great Gatsby*, which was published in the same year.

21 "The movie versions of Lorelei and Dorothy are like those of the book in that they actually possess the very thing they desire, [...] symbolized by the tiara. However, instead of presenting this situation as a moment of potential freedom, the movie uses it to punish the women for their aggressiveness and to reassert their proper place in the sexual order: the tiara must be taken out of their control. Thus, Piggie steals back the tiara he gave to Lorelei and is only discovered by the detective Malone, who rights everything in time for the two couples to join: Lorelei with Gus, Dorothy with Malone." (Hegeman: 548) In this regard, the movie can be considered more restrictive and in order with society and moral standards than the novel.

Dorothy as Lorelei's dark double

22 The character of Dorothy has already been discussed in some detail in this essay but since "a picture is worth a thousand words" this still frame from the movie's opening number "Little Rock" should be considered for the analysis of the two main characters:



Fig. 2.

23 In this picture the two women can be seen wearing the same, flashy red dresses and they inhabit the same place on the screen – no one is emphasized in the foreground or marginalized in the background. The only way we can discern them is by their faces. This "clear camaraderie between the two woman stars, [...] serv[ing] visually and narratively as each other's double and opposite. They also affirm their allegiance to one another over and above the interests of their male love objects, displaying a kind of partnership that some critics have described as romantic and erotic." (Hegeman: 547) This relationship has indeed been a topic of contemporary feminist scholarship, most prominently featured perhaps in

Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca's *Pre-Text and Text in 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes'* who state that "[o]ne of the most extraordinary and positive aspects of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes'* depiction of the friendship between [Lorelei and Dorothy] is the absence of competitiveness, envy, and pettiness." (Arbuthnot: 121) This camaraderie is definitely a positive aspect that has to be stressed – still, the heroines of the movie are strongly sexualized and serve in the "traditional exhibitionist role [to be] looked at and displayed, [...] their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact." (Mulvey: 837)

24 Although this friendship is also featured in the novel, where even after her marriage Lorelei "retains complete autonomy over her actions and continues her strong and central relationship with Dorothy, whose importance clearly eclipses devotion offered by any man," (Barreca: xvii) this essay wants to draw a clear distinction insofar as the book's Dorothy cannot be considered as Lorelei's "dark double" and her equal. This question of equality is brought up early on as Lorelei writes in her diary: "Dorothy never has any fate in her life and she does nothing but waste her time and I really wonder if I did right to bring her with me and not Lulu." (Loos: 22) She muses if she shouldn't have brought her black maid with her instead of Dorothy, expressing control over the situation and also a friend.

25 Yet what seems of greater importance is the very different function Dorothy has in the novel "as the force of tough-cookie righteousness in Loos's work (and, one imagines, more often than not the mouthpiece for Loos's own wisecracks)." (Barreca: xiv) Dorothy can even be considered as a self-insertion of the author: "so Loos's own position would be that of Lorelei's flapper sidekick, Dorothy Shaw. This sidekick is not only darker but smarter than the narrating Lorelei." (Hegeman: 529)

Conclusion

26 All the topics discussed in this essay and their varying possible interpretations help to illustrate the sheer depth of meaning Loos's novel and her characters offer and how much room for debate there still is. While one group of critics argued that "Lorelei's humorous exploitation of men shows Loos endorsing the system of conspicuous consumption that produces the gold digger, as well as the gender dynamics inherent in that system – not critiquing them" (Tracy: 136), others argue that Lorelei's appeal lies in "her ability to manipulate her own image and effectively become mistress of her own grand confidence game. Throughout the novel, it is clear that Lorelei is aware of herself as an image, and she constantly adjusts this image to best 'take advantage' of the situation around her." (Cella: 47) This ambiguity the novel leaves is what allows for interpretation and this is also where humor

and satire enter the novel. In adapting the text for the stage and later the cinema much of this ambiguity had to be reduced. This is connected to the medium as "director and performers make choices that inevitable reduce the 'interpretive richness' of the written text [...]; in a movie or television adaptation, those choices are final, recorded forever." (Hutcheon: 70)

27 Besides this loss of interpretive richness the changes and dissimilarities between novel and book can be grouped into two broad, main categories – either the changes were motivated by an alteration in the form and genre, as in the reduction of destinations on Lorelei's and Dorothy's journey which stems from the musical version and was adopted by the film version or the very format of the five sing and dance numbers with story segments in between. The other large category would be changes traced back to social, political and psychological factors. This would encompass the move from the 1920s backdrop of the novel to the era-unspecified film or most of the changes and different interpretations in the characters, most prominently in the two main characters.

28 In between are a few aspects that can be explained with either of the two categories or which cannot be closer specified or reduced to one category. In this field we have the transformation of Dorothy from a mouthpiece of the author Anita Loos to the dark double of Lorelei in the film version which either can be attributed to psychological factors or the fact that Anita Loos was not involved in the film's production and there would not have been an association with her by the audience, due to both her waning prominence and of course the strong visuality of the medium.

29 Concluding it can be said that it is not the understanding of this essay that "*Blondes*'s critical reputation as a literary work may be marred for some by its fame as the basis of the popular stage musical starring Carol Channing and the 1953 Howard Hawks musical film starring Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell," (Hegeman: 525) as the three works in question vary considerably from each other and cannot be compared on terms of equality as an adaptation is always a interpretation of the original. Comparing and contrasting can be a worthwhile and interesting endeavor – especially in terms of detecting social, cultural change and political change – as this essay's findings have shown and there is still much room for further research on this particular topic.

Works Cited

- Arbuthnot, Lucie and Gail Seneca. "Pre-text and Text in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*. Ed. Patricia Erens. Bloomington, Ind. 1990.
- Barreca, Regina. "Introduction." *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. London: Penguin Books, 1998.
- Carey, Gary. Anita Loos: a biography. London: Bloomsbury, 1988.
- Cella, Laurie J.C. "Narrative 'Confidence Games': Framing the Blonde Spectacle in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) and *Nights at the Circus* (1984)". *Frontiers*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (2004). 47 - 62.
- Currell, Susan. *American Culture in the 1920s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009.
- Fraser, Nancy. *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition: Rethinking Key Concepts of a Post-socialist Age*. New York & London: Routledge, 1997.
- Frost, Laura. "Blondes Have More Fun: Anita Loos and the Language of Silent Cinema." *Modernism / modernity*, Vol. 17, No. 2. 291 - 311.
- Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Jane Russell , Marilyn Monroe , Charles Coburn ; Directed by Howard Hawks. Drehbuch Charles Lederer. - Frankfurt am Main : Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, © 2005.
- Hegeman, Susan. "Taking Blondes Seriously". *American Literary History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, *Imagining a National Culture* (Autumn, 1995). 525 - 554.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York & London: Routledge, 2006.
- Langford, Barry. "The Musical: Genre and Form." *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond*. 82 – 105.
- Loos, Anita. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes: the Illuminating Diary of a Professional Lady*. London: Penguin Books, 1998.
- McFarlane, Brian. "Reading Film and Literature." *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*. Eds. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 833 – 44.
- Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "Gold Diggers of 1933: Howard Hawks's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*." *Placing Movies. The Practice of Film Criticism*. 94 - 105
- Tracy, Daniel. "From Vernacular Humor to Middlebrow Modernism: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and the Creation of Literary Value". *Arizona Quarterly*, Vol 66, No. 1 (Spring, 2010). 115 – 143.

Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appriation*. London & New York: Routledge, 2006.

Walker, Nancy A. *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1988.

The Most Dangerous Presumption: Women Authors and the Problems of Writing Satire

By Christine Künzel, University of Hamburg, Germany

Abstract:

The essay discusses the question why it is that women writers are almost absent from the canon of satirical writing. While female writers have managed during the 20th Century to establish themselves in all genres of literature, satire, with very few exceptions, has remained a territory for male writers. One of the main arguments for this absence is the fact that satire is one of the most aggressive forms of humour. While the tabooisation of aggression, which to a certain extent undermines satire, also applies to male authors, the position of the female writer, already rendered precarious by its deviation from the norm, is exacerbated by her position as a satirist and as a woman. German writer Gisela Elsner (1937-1992), lately being referred to as an “older sister” to Elfriede Jelinek, has accurately described this position as a “literary ghetto.” The example of the reception of Elsner’s work demonstrates how a blocking-out of a certain female tradition of satire reveals not only the limits, but also the blind spots of feminist-leaning women’s literature studies.

1 “Why is it that women write so little satire?” (“Warum schreiben Frauen so wenig Satiren?”) is a question posed in 1984 by Hilde Wackerhagen, and one that is still valid today. Even though gender theories have been informing literary scholarship since the development of feminist literary criticism in the 1970s, the theory of satire (so far) seems to have been largely untouched by them, and companions to (German-language) literature even now mention (almost) exclusively male writers,¹ without discussing in any shape or form why this choice has been made. Paul Simpson notes in this regard “that the tradition of canonical satire is overwhelmingly male-dominated” (56). This is all the more surprising, since German-speaking writers such as Gisela Elsner and Elfriede Jelinek were drawing attention in interviews early on to the discrimination taking place against satire by women (*Interviews with Hoffmeister*) and Anglo-American studies are now also bringing into the discussion the aspect of satire as a “gendered genre” (Knight 6 f.; see also Simpson 55 f.) or “‘manly’ genre” (Kairoff 276).

The Absence of Women Authors from the Canon of Satirical Writing

2 In an essay anthology published in 1992, literary scholar Christiane Rasper noted that “the specific features of ‘female’ satire [had] not yet [...] been made the subject of theoretical

¹ The only exception in more recent German literary lexica is Elfriede Jelinek (Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft 359; Metzler Lexikon Literatur, 679). The Encyclopedia of Satirical Literature (Snodgrass) mentions Aphra Behn and Colette.

consideration in studies of satire” (“die Spezifika ‘weiblicher’ Satire bisher [...] noch nicht zum Gegenstand theoretischer Überlegungen innerhalb der Satire-Forschung gemacht worden [seien]”; 292). Not much has changed in this regard even up to now. It is true that a few comprehensive studies on the Grotesque and Satire as literary genres have been published over the past few years, but hardly any of these raise the thorny issue of the problematical position of female writers and their work. In one recent study on the literary tradition of satire, Charles A. Knight claims that, because of a “virtual absence of women as satirists before the twentieth century (and hence their absence from much of the study as well)” (7 f.), satire is “more-or-less a masculine genre” (6). Even younger female writers such as Felicitas Hoppe note that “[i]n this country of ours, even satire is firmly in male hands. In fact, it is all relatively fixed and hardly includes any women at all” (“In diesem unseren Lande ist auch die Satire in festen Händen. Das ist eigentlich alles relativ festgelegt, und Frauen sind da kaum dabei”; 254). Against this background, it is all the more surprising, that feminist literary criticism has up to now hardly addressed this topic (Rasper 292).² The same is true of the theory of satire, at least in the German-speaking countries.³ So why is it, then, “that no woman has ever made a mark in satire” (Worcester 13)? And why is it that there are hardly any works of literary scholarship yet that deal with satirical texts by women writers?

Satire as the Most Aggressive Form of Humour

3 The arguments raised against satire have always been many and varied. Some of the most common accusations levelled, and of interest here, are the “built-in obsolescence” (“*Zeitverfallenheit*”; Gaier 333) of satire, the suggestion that it reduces characters to caricatures (Gregson 4 f.; see also Hodgart 188), with, concomitantly, its supposed lack of empathy with its characters and, finally, its tendency to take political sides with a one-sided moral and political stance (Arntzen, *Satirischer Stil* 1). But the most serious criticism of satire has less to do with its aesthetic status than with its gesture, specifically its aggressive potential, “[b]ecause satire is so close – in intent, effect, and often in form – to actual vituperation” (Eden 589). The humour of satire, unlike other forms and genres of humour, is not conciliatory, but aggressive, hurtful. Aggressiveness is an essential feature of satire in various social and cultural contexts: “All satire attacks something.” (Elliott 22) Ulrich Gaier, following Robert C. Elliott, interprets satirical language as a “weapon” (“*Kampfmittel*”; 335) in an “*assault upon an ‘outrageous reality’*” (“*Angriff auf eine ‘empörende Wirklichkeit’*”; 4).

² Exception to this are the studies by Heidemann-Nebelin, and Stauß.

³ The Anglo-American and French traditions are different, cf. among others the studies by Nussbaum, Kairoff, and Duval/Martinez.

Christoph Deupmann, sees the grounding of satire's problematical position as being in particular in the "tabooisation of aggression" (*"Aggressionstabu"*; 20) in modern bourgeois society: "the exiling of the satirical from the civilised world is thus in line with the stated aim of the banishment of violence from the culture" (*"Dem postulierten Ausschluß der Gewalt aus der Kultur entspricht daher die Exilierung des Satirischen aus der zivilisierten Welt"*; 8). For Deupmann, who follows Brummack's definition of satire as "aesthetically socialised aggression" (*"ästhetisch sozialisierte Aggression"*; Brummack 282), this means that the aggression inherent in satire as a form of writing renders its position precarious (12).

4 The problematical status of women writers who dedicate themselves to satire as a mode of writing is largely due to the fact that the literary attitude inherent in satirical texts harbours a potential for aggression which, in the final analysis, is intended destructively (Arntzen, *Nachricht* 572; see also Rasper 291). If we look at the history of women's writing, we see that aggressiveness, brutality and negativity are literary gestures which have been appropriated by only a very few women writers. "The more aggressive the jokes become, the less we see women involved in making them." (*"Je deutlicher die aggressive Tendenz im Scherzen ist, umso weniger wurde die Aktivität von Frauen betrieben"*; Kotthoff 214). Even in work being written by women today, aggressive forms of humour are still the exception.

5 While the tabooisation of aggression, which to a certain extent undermines satire, also applies to male authors, the position of the female writer, already rendered precarious by its deviation from the norm, is exacerbated by her position as a *satirist* and as a *woman*. The prohibition of female aggressiveness, and even denying its existence, has a long tradition (Musfeld; Stauß 73). Since rejecting female aggressiveness involves a taboo which has been and is still propagated and upheld by women themselves, this aspect is more or less a blind spot even now in feminist interrogations of constructions of femininity (Musfeld 17 ff.). Studies arguing from an essentialist and/or biologicistic point of view and proceeding from the assumption of a more or less 'natural' inhibition in women against aggression are still doing the rounds, such as the one by Zita Dresner on Femininity and Humour:

Perhaps because women have been the child-bearers and homemakers, assumed or been prevailed upon to accept the role of civilizers and stabilizers of society [...]. Perhaps because women have had a history of coping with powerlessness, lowering their sights, modifying their needs, and compromising their desires, their humor has been less volatile and nihilistic than men's. (153)

6 While the focus of research on violence has now (following Foucault) switched to the *productive* aspects of (male) violence as the centre of interest (Meuser 53), no such trend can (yet) be discerned in Women's and Gender Studies. The productive effect of female

violent acts has up to now, if at all, been dealt with predominantly within the framework of criminology. As Tamara Musfeld explains in her study of the taboo against female violence, aggression “[covers] indeed not only destruction and hate, but also productive forms, which are essentially necessary for the development of autonomy, i.e. setting boundaries, assertion, self-assertion and defence of one’s own interests” (“[umfasst] ja nicht nur Destruktion und Hass, sondern auch produktive Formen, die wesentlich zur Autonomieentwicklung, d. h. zur Abgrenzung, Durchsetzung, Selbstbehauptung und Verteidigung eigener Interessen notwendig [sind]”; 8). This is also the drift of Deupmann’s argument, with regard to satire, when he refers to the “dialectical relationship between ‘destruction’ and ‘production’” (“dialektische Beziehung von ‘Destruktion’ und ‘Produktion’”):

By attacking its target using the aesthetic means of comic alienation, fictionalisation, ironisation or paradoxical, stylised figures, satire’s destructive act itself becomes an eminently productive process, one of “productive destruction.” Indem Satire ihr Objekt mit Hilfe ästhetischer Mittel der komischen Verfremdung, Fiktionalisierung, Ironisierung oder paradoxen Stilfiguren attackiert, gerät der destruktive Akt selbst zu einem eminent produktiven Vorgang, zur “produktiven Destruktion.”] (30 f.)

Against this background, it is more than surprising that the intensive discussion of the subject of violence that is going on in literary and cultural studies has not yet resulted in any (re-) involvement with satire.

7 If we look at reviews of satirical and grotesque texts by female writers, however, we gain the impression that irony, ridicule, polemics and sarcasm are exclusively the preserve of the male of the writing club. “For historically, women are more frequently to be found in the role of the laughed-*at* than of the one doing the laughing, rather the butt of ridicule, jokes, obscenities and laughter than having something to laugh about themselves” (“In der Geschichte sind Frauen denn auch eher in der Rolle der *Verlachten* als der Lachenden vorzufinden; eher sind sie Objekt von Spott, Witzen, Zoten und Gelächter, als daß sie selbst etwas zu lachen hätten”; Weigel 172; see also Kotthoff 208 f.). Thus, the female sex is the preferred butt of satirical ridicule (Hodgart, chapter 3; see also Nussbaum). Simpson speaks in this connection of “a deeply misogynistic practice in canonical satirical writing” (56).

The Evil Eye: Women Satirists

8 Women writers who employ satirical modes of writing are, conversely, quickly branded, and not just by male critics, as unfeminine, as “witches with the evil eye” (“Hexen mit dem bösen Blick”), as “wily devils” (“abgefeimte Biester”) or “bitches” (“Luder”; Morrien 496 f.; see also Rasper 291). By contrast, male authors displaying such aggressive

behaviour are regarded in a positive light, even being awarded a literary label of their own, that of the 'angry young men' who gained a lot of attention in the 1950s.

9 But it is not just the taboo against female aggression that has to be held responsible for the reticence of women writers in the area of satire. The contradictions thrown up by the social status of women are reflected in its precarious position between classical literary genres and in the "borderland position of satire at the edges of poetry" ("Grenzlage der Satire am Rande der Poesie"; Deupmann 35). Satire shares with literature written by women the "taint of the 'lesser genre'" ("Makel der 'niedereren Gattung'"; Hinck 12). So if a woman writer ventures into the territory of satire, this effectively amounts to a "multiple marginalisation" ("mehrfache Marginalisierung"; Peiter 53; see also Dresner 139) and contributes to the reinforcement of her already precarious position as a woman *and* as a woman writer. The German writer Gisela Elsner has accurately described this position as a "literary ghetto" ("literarisches Ghetto"; *Autorinnen*). Against this background, Horace's comment about the riskiness of writing satire (*Satires* II.I., 60-62; see also Brummack 296) has special resonance for the woman writer of satire. The ensuing paradoxical situation of participating in and at the same time being excluded from the culture (Bourdieu 196-203) lead to contradictions which also inform the work of women writers: "satire presupposes the deep sense of participation, socially and culturally. Only the club's members are allowed to make fun of it." ("Satire setzt das tiefe Gefühl von gesellschaftlicher, kultureller Teilhabe voraus. Nur die Mitglieder eines Clubs dürfen sich über denselben lustig machen"; Wackerhagen 139). If the position of the author (in the sense of *auctor*) already presupposes a high degree of authority, it is crucial for satire to succeed that its author possesses sufficient *authority* "to justify his punishing actions and empower him to comment on what he sees around him" ("die sein strafendes Vorgehen rechtfertigt und ihn zur Kommentierung der Erkenntnisvorgänge befähigt"; Schönert 29). Susan Purdy notes in this connection that "all joking 'masters' discourse, and thereby seizes ideological power and constructs and confirms socio-economic power. [...] And in patriarchy, the power of joking significantly supports and is appropriated by 'natural' male authority." (147) Against this background, the presumptuousness of assuming the role of author appears to be a significantly greater challenge, if not actually a risk, for a woman writer in the case of satire (Kairoff 277).

10 When the (West) German writer Gisela Elsner proclaims that "[b]efore me there were women writers like Ina Seidel, Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Ingeborg Bachmann and Ilse Aichinger. I was the first woman to write a satire, namely *Die Riesenzwerge* [*The Giant Dwarfs*]" ("Vor mir gab es Schriftstellerinnen wie Ina Seidel, Marie Luise Kaschnitz,

Ingeborg Bachmann und Ilse Aichinger. Ich war die erste Frau, die eine Satire, nämlich *Die Riesenzwerg* schrieb”; *Interview with Hoffmeister* 116), this should not be seen purely as a provocation, but also in a certain sense as deliberate presumption. This is entirely the sense in which Elfriede Jelinek describes Gisela Elsner’s work as “the critical presumption of satire that is constantly emphasising its critical distance from its figures, although this distance is in itself a presumption” (“die kritische Anmaßung der Satire, die ihre kritische Distanz zu den Personen immer wieder betont, obwohl schon diese Distanz eine Anmaßung ist”; *Ist die schwarze Köchin da?* 25). If the very fact of a woman being a writer in itself constitutes a challenge to male authority, then the female writer daring to enter the territory of satire is presuming a quasi “divinely judgemental” authority that has been felt to be problematic even in male satirists (Deupmann 270; see also Lazarowicz 2 f.), but is interpreted as sheer blasphemy in women writers. The problem involves the fundamental exclusion of female comedy deriving from the fact that “beneath the comic act there is always a transgression to be found, even if it is only a transgression in language” (“dem komischen Akt immer eine Art von Normbruch zugrunde liegt, und sei es nur die Brechung einer sprachlichen Norm”; Kotthoff 210). “A woman’s not supposed to do that,” (“Das steht einer Frau nicht zu”; *Interview with Hoffmeister* 125) as Jelinek replies to the question of satire in her work. It is quite in this spirit that a critic said in a review of Elsner’s debut, *Die Riesenzwerg*, “Elsner would probably have been burnt as a witch for this way of seeing things a few hundred years ago” (“Wegen dieses Blickes hätte man die Elsner vor ein paar hundert Jahren wohl als Hexe verbrannt”; Schöfer)

11 Of course Elsner knew that women writers had written satirical texts before her.⁴ But by deliberately blocking out these names she is alluding to the fact that there was and is (still?) no female tradition of satire. At the same time, by making this statement, Elsner is anointing herself as the founder of such a tradition that is appropriating a “male”-connoted way of writing (Knight 6). While female writers have managed during the 20th Century to establish themselves in all genres of literature, satire, with very few exceptions, has remained a territory for male writers. By making this provocatively pointed statement, Elsner draws attention both to the lack of a female tradition in satire and to the gender exclusivity of the literary process itself. “Even the American *Time Magazine* says that a woman has here conquered a male-held territory” (“Sogar das amerikanische *Time Magazine* behauptet, daß hier eine Frau ein Terrain der Männer erobert hat”; *Interview with Hoffmeister* 116). Elsner

⁴ Such as Marieluise Fleißer, Mela Hartwig, Anna Seghers, Erika Mann, Irmgard Keun, Veza Canetti etc. (Heidemann-Nebelin). But the essential difference between these women writers and Gisela Elsner is that Elsner wrote exclusively satire

was convinced that, with the appearance of her debut, *Die Riesenzwerg*, and its winning the "Prix Formentor" in the mid-1960s, she had "opened a certain door for all women writers" ("allen Schriftstellerinnen eine gewisse Tür aufgemacht"), and that, since she had been "crucified" by the critics ("alles auf dem Deckel [bekam]"), others would have "a much easier time of it" ("es dann einfacher [hätten]"; *Interview with Hoffmeister* 116). Elsner also refers to the typical German attitude to satire by observing, with an eye to Britain and France, that satires by women writers in West Germany were still seen "like trips to the brothel, exclusively a male affair" ("wie Bordellbesuche ausschließlich als Männersache"; *Vereinfacher* 123).

Offside: German satirist Gisela Elsner (1937-1992)

12 In the feuilletons (cultural pages of the newspapers), she was celebrated and feared as a "writing Cleopatra" ("schreibende Kleopatra"; Künzel, *Schreibende Kleopatra*) and an "Amazon with the evil eye" ("Amazone mit dem bösen Blick"; Elsner, *Autorinnen* 137). Her trademarks were her "Cleopatra-look" wigs and thickly-applied eye-liner. Just like Elfriede Jelinek's, Gisela Elsner's public appearances were carefully staged. With this conspicuous get-up, which to a certain extent became her trademark, Elsner would certainly have had what it takes to be a "literary icon," given her being talked about retrospectively beside Ingeborg Bachmann as one of the few female stars among Germany's young writers of the Sixties. But less and less was heard during the Eighties from the once so-celebrated author of her debut *Die Riesenzwerg* (*The Giant Dwarfs*) (1964). In the end, her novels were hardly reviewed any more in the serious press and critics finally had no inhibitions any more about letting rip mercilessly in their reviews, gleefully demolishing Elsner's works. "The critics were tired of Gisela Elsner's books [...]" "Die Kritik hatte Gisela Elsners Bücher satt [...]" (Spiegel 43). Elsner's last novel, *Fliegeralarm* (*Air Raid Warning*) (1989), for example, was described by Heinz Ludwig Arnold in the *Zeit* as "embarrassingly wretched and cynical prose" ("peinlich miserable und zynische Prosa"; *Nichts als Ruinen* 47).

13 Against this background, Sigrid Löffler's claim that "probably no writer in the Western world has attracted as much hostility in the past few decades as Elfriede Jelinek" ("[m]ehr Feindschaft als Elfriede Jelinek [habe] wohl kein Schriftsteller der westlichen Welt in den letzten Jahrzehnten auf sich gezogen"; 10), should be relativised, since Jelinek herself has noted that Gisela Elsner and her work "were dropped in a pretty unparalleled way" ("auf eine Art fallengelassen wurde[n], die eigentlich ziemlich beispiellos ist"; *Ist die Schwarze Köchin da?* 24) by the literary crowd. The writer's suicide in May 1992, too, was used by

some critics as a final opportunity to "put the boot in" (Kunstreich, *Eine Kommunistin*). These things only happen, and to this extent Sigrid Löffler is in principle right to take Jelinek as an example, to a women writer: "the whole literary crowd, the feuilletons, critics, the lot, were increasingly openly hostile to Elsner. [...] this sort of thing as well can only happen to women" ("die elsner wurde vom gesamten literaturbetrieb, dem feuilleton, der kritik zunehmend offen angefeindet. [...] auch sowas passiert nur frauen"; Meyers 9). Perhaps this should be qualified by saying that this sort of thing happens especially to women writers who step over the line of gender-stereotyped "feminine" forms of writing and devote themselves to such forms as satire that take an offensive stance.

14 While, however, Jelinek has had a dedicated (albeit to begin with small) group of fans, among both literary critics and literary and theatrical academia, from the beginning of her literary career, Elsner has never, even now, received such recognition, even in part. Animosity (in some cases even hostility) against Elsner has remained firm even after her death. Even now, just the very mention of the writer's name is enough to set off "emotional reactions" [emotionale Reaktionen] in "representatives of the literary crowd" ("Vertretern des Literaturbetriebs"; Kunstreich, *Hoffnung* 48). This seems to be an example of that widely-distributed, unfair short-circuit, even among serious literary scholars and critics, whereby "the wickedness of the writing [is taken to be evidence of] wickedness in the writer" ("von der Bösartigkeit des Geschriebenen auf die Bösartigkeit der Schreiberin [geschlossen wird]"; Löffler 12).

15 Elfriede Jelinek is not only now an established part of the literary canon, but also, much to the outrage of many a critic, and not just in the German feuilletons, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2004. In contrast, the work of her "older sister" ("ältere Schwester"; Rutschky 20) has been sliding gradually into oblivion, so that Elsner and her works have today been as good as eradicated from academic literary studies, and even from women's literature studies, and from the consciousness of readers. "Gisela Elsner is simply dead and gone" ("Gisela Elsner ist einfach tot und weg"; Kinder 292).

16 If Elsner was still at least present with short stories and/or novel extracts in anthologies and textbooks into the Eighties, she was completely erased from the literary and academic memory from the Nineties until the appearance in 2000 of the film *Die Unberührbare* (*The Untouchable*). To try to tie in with the film and ride the tide of its success, the Aufbau Verlag in 2001 published the correspondence between Gisela Elsner and Klaus Roehler under the title *Wespen im Schnee* (*Wasps in the Snow*) and, in the same year, a paperback edition of *Die Riesenzwerg*. Since there was, however, only very muted interest in

these editions, the press was reluctant to bring out new editions of other books by Elsner. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that there are to date hardly any literary studies available dealing exhaustively with Elsner's work.⁵ In spite of the fact that Elsner has left behind a considerable body of work – in just under thirty years she published nine⁶ novels, two volumes of stories, a volume of collected essays, three radio plays and an opera libretto – hardly any of her other books, apart from *Die Riesenzwerg*, republished in 1995 and 2001, are generally known today.

17 The “literary sensation of 1964” (“Sensationsautorin des Jahres 1964”; Brock 19) slipped slowly but surely into oblivion. Her social and literary isolation certainly owed much to her joining the German Communist Party (DKP) in 1977 and her subsequent commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideas and utopias, but also, and mainly, to her literary programme of satire, which constantly set her at odds with fashion and “at odds with the literary norm” (“quer zur literarischen Norm”; Cremer/Winter 11).

18 The image of the “thrown-away thorn” (“des entsorgten Stachels”), that Hermann Kinder has proposed with regard to Elsner's position in the literary world, is perfectly accurate in this context, since it plays on the hurtful nature of satire. It is astounding that this writer's work has not (yet) been rediscovered as part of any scramble to rediscover “forgotten” writers, and in particular women writers: “What is surprising [...] is that a literary scholarship that bestows its favour so lavishly on literature by women [...] has simply ignored Gisela Elsner” (“Erstaunlich [...] ist, daß eine Literaturwissenschaft, die ihre Gunst so verschwenderisch für Frauenliteratur ausstreut [...], Gisela Elsner schlichtweg ausgeblendet hat”; Kinder 292). Not even her suicide in May 1992 did anything to change this situation – an act which is otherwise seen to a certain extent as a guarantee of admission to the Olympian realm of rediscovered women writers.

Gisela Elsner's suicide has never achieved the mythical immortality [...] either of Sylvia Plath's or of Ingeborg Bachmann's. The reaction to Gisela Elsner's death, which, indeed, was already the lot of her work during her lifetime, since it was in a way just dropped, [is] in fact fairly unparalleled [...].

Gisela Elsners Selbstmord hat weder die mythische Unsterblichkeit [...] einer Sylvia Plath noch die einer Ingeborg Bachmann je erreicht. Die Reaktion auf Gisela Elsners Tod, der ihrem Werk ja schon zu Lebzeiten beschieden war, indem es auf eine Art fallengelassen

⁵ The only exceptions to this are the studies by Flitner, Cremer, and Mindt

⁶ This includes the novel *Heilig Blut* (*Holy Blood*), which was only published in Russian, in 1987, during Elsner's lifetime. The first German edition was not published until 20 years later.

wurde, [ist] eigentlich ziemlich beispiellos [...].] (Jelinek, *Ist die Schwarze Köchin da?* 24; see also Kinder 293)

19 What is also practically unparalleled in the literary world is the fact that there was no ‘reconciliation’ with the writer, even after her tragic death (Kunstreich, *Unversöhnter Abgang* 53). This means that the work of the most radical, and probably most significant, female satirist in contemporary German literature has up to now hardly been paid any attention in literary scholarship (Künzel, *Einmal im Abseits*). And this is in spite of the fact that Elsner was celebrated in the feuilletons, even during her lifetime, as “a successor to Swift” (“Nachfahrin von Swift”; Dallmann), and also, retrospectively, as “a master of the satirical grotesque” (“Meisterin der satirischen Groteske”; Polt-Heinzl, *Ausbruch*). At least her novel *Die Riesenzwerg*e has now been admitted to the canon of masterpieces by 20th Century German-speaking women writers (Künzel, Gisela Elsner). In this sense, Elsner can certainly be seen as a forerunner of younger writers such as Elfriede Jelinek; her works were and are no less provocative (März 64).

Sisters in Satire: Gisela Elsner and Elfriede Jelinek

20 The correspondences between Gisela Elsner and Elfriede Jelinek are many and varied, even though little or no attention has been paid to them up to now in scholarly writing on Jelinek. The points the two writers have in common were recognised at an early stage, then forgotten or rather suppressed for some 25 years and not rediscovered until the mid-1990s. When Jelinek submitted her first manuscript, *bukolit*, to Rowohlt Verlag (which was also Elsner’s publisher from 1964 to 1986) in 1969, it was rejected on the grounds that with Elsner the publisher already had one woman writer under contract with a “predilection for vegetative monstrosities, cannibals and blackheads” (“Vorliebe für vegetative Monstrositäten, Kannibalen und Mitesser”; Flitner 43 f.). Although Elsner had been acclaimed as “humorist of the monstrous” (“Humorist[in] des Monströsen”; Enzensberger 15) her name is hardly ever mentioned in studies on humour, comedy or laughter in women’s writing.

21 Yet these parallels were never discussed during Elsner’s lifetime, either in the feuilletons or in literary scholarship.⁷ It was only after her death, in the mid-90s, that Gisela Elsner was recognised “alongside Elfriede Jelinek, who was nine years younger and established as a woman writer in the literature of the post-war period to a degree that Elsner was not” (“an der Seite der neun Jahre jüngeren und ungleich etablierteren als eine Autorin der Nachkriegsliteratur”; Polt-Heinzl, *Ich war die erste Frau* 193), and this in spite of the fact

⁷ The only exception to this is the study by Flitner.

that the two writers had themselves already, in interviews in the 80s, been pointing out common features in their writing and acknowledging their respect for each other in no uncertain terms. Thus, Jelinek said in an interview with Donna Hoffmeister in August 1985: “By the way, I have a great similarity with Gisela Elsner in terms of a certain wit and a certain irony” (“Übrigens mit Gisela Elsner habe ich eine große Ähnlichkeit in Bezug auf einen gewissen Witz und eine gewisse Ironie”; 122). In the same book of interviews, Elsner, who made no secret of her contempt for the ‘new women’s literature,’ was very positive in her enthusiasm for the younger writer Elfriede Jelinek: “I do not like reading [...] those kinds of books by women. [...] Elfriede Jelinek rises way above them by writing satire. She is one of the best, I think.” (“Ich lese [...] ungern solche Bücher von Frauen. [...] Jelinek bewegt sich durch Satire darüber hinaus. Sie ist eine der Besten, finde ich”; Interview with Hoffmeister 115).

22 In 1995, there were two publications at much the same time on connections between the two writers. One was Hermann Kinder’s afterword to a new edition of *Die Riesenzwerge*. Kinder sees parallels between Elsner and Jelinek, especially in their “attempts to produce a disrupting female gaze” (“Versuche[n] eines störenden weiblichen Blicks”; 292) – he is referring to the “offensive sharpness of Elsner’s gaze” (“anstößige Schärfe von Elsners Blick”; 293) – and in their leaning towards “negativity” (“Negativität”; 294). The other 1995 publication was Christine Flitner’s study of the reception of the work of Elsner and Jelinek in the *feuilletons*, and this is not only significantly more extensive than Kinder’s essay, but also teases out correspondences between the two women writers at quite different levels. For Flitner, Elsner and Jelinek are “the two most important women satirists in post-1945 German-language literature” (“die beiden wichtigsten Satirikerinnen der deutschsprachigen Literatur nach 1945”; 40). The key word ‘satire,’ however, although an aspect connecting the two writers, is one that, just like their political positioning, the two of them perceive differently.

23 While Elsner’s avowal of a satirical mode of writing has increasingly been criticised and dismissed as an anachronism since the 80s, there has been hardly any discussion of the satirical aspects of Jelinek’s work, either in reviews or in scholarly criticism. “It is surprising that this comic and satiric component in Jelinek’s plays, which is present throughout [...], is hardly remarked upon by critics” (“Erstaunlicherweise wird diese komische und satirische Komponente in Jelineks Stücken, die durchgängig vorhanden ist [...], in der Rezeption kaum wahrgenommen”; Uecker 93 f.) – one exception to this being the study by Heidemann-Nebelin, which does not, however, draw any correspondence between the two writers. This is all the more surprising, given that the two writers consciously perceived that they were both

breaking into a male territory with their satirical mode of writing, and were thus both at odds with the definitions of 'women's writing' or of a 'feminine aesthetic.' As Flitner correctly notes, the "general connotations of female authorship – empathy, restriction to subjects and genres with specific relevance for women and linguistic powerlessness [run] contrary to the conditions of satire" ("verbreiteten Konnotationen weiblicher Urheberschaft – Empathie, Beschränkung auf Themen und Genres mit spezifischer Relevanz für Frauen und Sprachohnmacht – [...] konträr zu den Bedingungen der Satire"; 45). Although the constitutive features of a satirical mode of writing include precisely the stylisation of characters even to the point of caricature (Gregson, esp. Introduction), it is an accusation that has been levelled against both writers again and again that it is not possible to identify with the characters they have created and that the writers show no empathy with their characters. But to judge from the accusation, also levelled equally at both writers, that the writing has no positive elements, it would appear that academic literary criticism has missed the point of the genre of satire.

24 While, however, Jelinek is thoroughly able to inscribe herself into an Austrian tradition of satire (Interview with Hoffmeister 122), this possibility was hardly available for Gisela Elsner. The tradition of satire in (West) Germany subscribes on the whole to a more harmless and less hurtful kind of humour than the scathingly hurtful satire of Karl Kraus, for example, who is explicitly cited by Jelinek. It is only in this context that Elsner's provocative claim to have founded a German-language tradition of women's satire can be fully understood (Interview with Hoffmeister 116). How could it happen, then, that the only woman satirist in contemporary German letters has been as good as forgotten?

Woman Satirist in a "Literary Ghetto"

25 A literary canon is not a homogeneous affair. Every genre develops its own canon to a certain extent. What has happened to Gisela Elsner is that she has been excluded from the very two canonical systems in which she could have attained significance, namely the canon of satirical literature and the canon of literature by women writers. By the 1980s, the literary environment in which Elsner's texts were seen had changed. The aesthetic programme of the 'new women's literature' overlapped to a not inconsiderable degree with a general trend shift that took place in literature in the 70s, the main feature of which was its distancing itself from the heavily politicised literature of the late 60s and, according to Laemmle, turning towards a "literature of experience" ("Erfahrungsliteratur"; 169) (with the tag "new sensitivity" ("neue Sinnlichkeit"; 155). This development meant that Elsner was unable to gain appropriate

recognition as a writer in either of the two canonical systems that might have been open to her ("satire" and/or "works by female writers").

26 The shift towards a "new subjectivity" or "new inwardness" (Möhrmann 339) was flanked by post-structural, deconstructivist theories of literature, the result of which was a general "retreat into [...] nothing-but-subjectivity or else into purely linguistic processes" ("Rückzug auf [...] Nur-noch-Subjektivität oder auf die reinen Sprachprozesse"), a withdrawal "from tackling the central problems of society" ("aus den zentralen Problemstellungen der Gesellschaft"; Arnold, *Anmerkungen* 37). The genre of satire, to which Elsner stayed loyal all her life, was diametrically opposed to such a literary programme. While in the 60s and 70s academic literary studies on satire were still appearing, even literary academia was increasingly silent on the subject of satire from the 80s onwards. Unlike Anglo-American or French philology, literary scholarship in Germany is practically ignoring satire nowadays, a state of affairs which is due not least to the lasting influence of postmodern literary theories (Schwind) and the associated revival of the aesthetic of autonomy (Hermand 810 f.). Satire clearly (no longer) has any place in the programme of a postmodern "aesthetic of non-commitment" ("Ästhetik der Unverbindlichkeit"; Hermand 59), one of the main features of which is the play of the "subjective imagination, of free association [...] and self-reinforcing self-reflection" ("Subjektiv-Imaginativen, der freien Assoziation [...] und der sich verstärkenden Selbstreflexivität"; Hermand 77 f.).

27 Elsner detected very early on the dismissive attitude held towards satire in a time when "precisely the incomprehensible [...] [was] taken to be significant" ("gerade das Unverständliche [...] für bedeutsam gehalten [wurde]"; *Bandwürmer* XVI) in literature, commenting that "here [in Germany] satirical texts are quite openly dismissed as a twisting of the facts, unlike poetry, in which it's perfectly okay for the reader to be presented with stuff snatched out of the air" ("Satiren werden hier [in Deutschland] im Gegensatz zur Dichtung, in der dem Leser getrost blauer Dunst vorgemacht werden darf, recht unumwunden als Tatsachenverdrehung abgetan"; *Vereinfacher* 124).

28 For the writer Gisela Elsner and for the reception of her work, then, several unfavourable factors came together that have contributed to a situation today where hardly anybody even knows her name, let alone the titles of any of her books. One of the main factors was the rise of the "new women's literature," the dominance of postmodern deconstructive theories in (feminist) academic literary studies and the concomitant evaporation of interest in satire as a mode of writing.

29 In the course of the emancipation movements in the 1970s and 80s and the establishment of the genre of “new women’s literature” (Becker-Cantarino), women’s studies developed a version of literary history, one of the main achievements of which was that it made sure that the absence of women writers from the literary canon in itself became a subject of discussion and that a large number of women writers were rediscovered; but at the same time, in conjunction with the creation of feminist literary scholarship, a preference developed for certain theories, and this had an effect on the canon of major works that can hardly be underestimated. From the combination of feminist academic literary studies, psychoanalysis and deconstructive theories⁸ a canon came into being in which it was hardly likely that the work of a writer like Gisela Elsner could find recognition. For one thing, her texts resist any psychoanalytical approach, even though they do sometimes include satirical allusions to Freudian theories (e.g. *Die Riesenzwerg*); and in any case, the satirical mode of writing is incompatible both with the demands made of “women’s writing” for empathy and the description of personal experience, and with the requirements of deconstructivist literary theory (or at least with the version of it that is practised in (West) Germany). Elsner, with her satirical mode of writing, is at odds with these tendencies, and at odds with the literary and “academic environment of humanities and cultural studies that owe allegiance to French ideas of post-history” (“Umfeld der auf die französischen Posthistorie-Vorstellungen [...] eingeschworenen Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften”; Hermand 3 f.).

30 While the gender system and order of the sexes, marriage, power and sexuality play a central role in a few of Elsner’s books, such as *Das Berührungsverbot* (*No Touching*), *Abseits* (*Offside*) and *Die Zähmung* (*The Taming*), women are not primarily presented in Elsner’s work as “victims” of the patriarchal order, but (like the wives in *Das Berührungsverbot*) as being accomplices, profiting (in part) from this system and/or being just as dominant and domineering when the opportunity arises for them to get into a position of power (like Bettina Begemann in *Die Zähmung*). The novel *Die Zähmung* is not, however, merely the “Chronicle of a Marriage” (“Chronik einer Ehe”), as its subtitle suggests, but at the same time a scathing settling of accounts with the genre of “women’s writing” of the 1980s.

31 In her novel, Elsner draws attention to, among other things, the dangers and problems associated with the proclamation of a “female aesthetic,” a subject that was debated with great engagement in feminist literary and cultural studies in the late 70s and early 80s. The assertion of a “female aesthetic” runs, and not just in Elsner’s view, the risk of perpetuating

⁸ The focus in introductions to “feminist theory” or “feminist literary theory” is clearly on deconstructivist and psychoanalytical theories and on discourse analysis after Foucault (Becker-Schmidt and Knapp; see also Lindhoff).

essentialist and biologicistic aspects of gender difference by defining women's art in terms of criteria that overlap with the only-too-familiar female stereotypes of autobiographical features, sensitivity, emotionality, inconsistency and irrationality, self-reflection and finding oneself. Values such as "originality, objectivity, dispassion, the ability to think logically, the ability to see the big picture and the confidence that is expressed as wit, satire and irony" ("Originalität, Objektivität, Sachlichkeit, die Fähigkeit, logisch zu denken, die Fähigkeit, größere Zusammenhänge zu erfassen, sowie die Souveränität, die durch Witz, Satire und Ironie zum Ausdruck kommt"; Elsner, *Autorinnen* 141), continue, accordingly, still to be reserved for male writers. I don't write in the way that, in their opinion, a woman ought to write. They've tried again and again to cram me into this women's writing box. I just don't fit. Their malevolent efforts have been no use. The only way they can talk about me as a writing woman is in biological terms. Ich schreibe nicht so, wie eine Frau ihrer Ansicht nach schreiben muß. Sie haben immer wieder versucht, mich in diese Frauenliteratur hineinzuschieben. Ich passe einfach nicht hin. Ihre böartigen Bemühungen haben nichts genutzt. Sie können mich als schreibende Frau nur aus biologischen Gründen erwähnen. (Elsner, *Interview with Hoffmeister* 116)

32 Satirical texts by women writers have been considered, if at all, in women's literature studies and literary scholarship with a leaning towards gender theory only if they deal explicitly with the topics of gender struggle, sexuality and power and more or less explicitly present women as being the victims of the patriarchal order. Even the few recent studies of women satirical writers, such as those by Heidemann-Nebelin and Stauß, seem to operate within this limited parameter. Thus, a situation has come about whereby women writers who have *also* written satire are inscribed into the canon of female satirists, while a writer such as Elsner, who produced a large body of satirical work, is in this context merely mentioned by name in the introduction (Heidemann-Nebelin 2). Christa Reinig, some ten years older, and Elfriede Jelinek, some ten years younger, are thus treated as favourites in a canon of female, respectively feminist satire (Heidemann-Nebelin) – while Gisela Elsner is not.

33 With *Das Berührungsverbot* (*No Touching*), regarded in retrospect by critics as a forerunner of *Lust* (1989), the novel of Jelinek's that caused such a scandal, Elsner, described in an obituary as a "latter-day sister of Cassandra" ("späte Schwester Kassandras"; Berger), suffered the same fate as with many of her books: they came too soon to be accorded the recognition they deserved (Polt-Heinzl, *Zu früh geboren* 80). The blocking-out of a certain female tradition of satire reveals not only the limits, but also the blind spots of feminist-leaning women's literature studies. It means that the categories of this (counter-) canon of

literature by women writers are just as questionable and seem just as exclusive as those of a traditionally 'male'-dominated literary canon (Heydebrand/Winko 150 ff.). But even the most recent studies and literary lexica are still propagating the image of a canon of satirical writing that is dominated by male writers, continuing the prejudice even now that says that satire is "more-or-less a masculine genre" (Knight 6).

Translated by Catherine Hales

Works Cited

- Arnold, Heinz Ludwig. "Anmerkungen zur literarischen Entwicklung in der Bundesrepublik." *Positionen im deutschen Roman der sechziger Jahre*. Eds. Heinz Ludwig Arnold, and Theo Buck. München: Edition Text+Kritik, 1974. 9-38.
- . "Nichts als Ruinen." *Die Zeit*. 25 Aug. 1989. 47.
- Arntzen, Helmut. *Satirischer Stil. Zur Satire Robert Musils im „Mann ohne Eigenschaften“*. Bonn: Bouvier, 1960.
- . "Nachricht von der Satire." *Neue Rundschau* 74 (1963). 561-576.
- Becker-Cantarino, Barbara. "Frauenliteratur." *Metzler Lexikon Gender Studies / Geschlechterforschung*. Ed. Renate Kroll. Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 2002. S. 123-125.
- Becker-Schmidt, Regina, and Gudrun-Axeli Knapp. *Feministische Theorien zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius, 2000.
- Berger, Peter. "Eine späte Schwester Kassandras." *Neues Deutschland*. 20 May 1992.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Die männliche Herrschaft." *Ein alltägliches Spiel: Geschlechterkonstruktion in der sozialen Praxis*. Eds. Irene Dölling and Beate Krais. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1997. 153-217.
- Brock, Hans Bertram. "Pioniere des Nichts. Interview mit der Nürnberger Autorin Gisela Elsner." *Nürnberger Nachrichten*. 26 Oct. 1976. 19.
- Brummack, Jürgen. "Zu Begriff und Theorie der Satire." *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*. 45. Special Issue: Forschungsreferate (1971): 275-377.
- Cremer, Dorothe. "Ihre Gebärden sind riesig, ihre Äußerungen winzig." *Zu Gisela Elsners "Die Riesenzwerg". Schreibweise und soziale Realität der Adenauerzeit*. Herbolzheim: Centaurus, 2003.
- Cremer, Dorothe, and Frank Winter. "Schockeffekte." *Neues Deutschland*. 2 May 1997. 11.
- Dallmann, Günter. "Nachfahrin von Swift." *Der Tagesspiegel*. 22 July 1965.
- Deupmann, Christoph. "Furor satiricus." *Verhandlungen über literarische Aggression im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002.
- Dresner, Zita. "Women's Humor." *Humor in America. A Research Guide to Genres and Topics*. Ed. Lawrence E. Mintz. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988. 137-161.
- Duval, Sophie/Martinez, Marc. *La satire (littératures française et anglaise)*. Paris: Colin, 2000.
- Eden, Rick. "Master Tropes in Satire." *Style*. 21.4 (Winter 1987): 589-606.

- Elliott, Robert C. "The Definition of *Satire*: A Note on Method." *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*. 11 (1962): 19-23.
- Elsner, Gisela. *Die Riesenzwerg*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1964. New editions: Hamburg: Rotbuch, 1995; Berlin: Aufbau, 2001. [English edition: *The Giant Dwarfs*. Trans. Joel Carmichael. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965.]
- . *Das Berührungsverbot*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1970. New edition: Ed. Christine Künzel. Berlin: Verbrecher, 2006. [French edition: *Défense de toucher*. Trans. Lily Jumel. Paris: Gallimard, 1973.]
- . "Vereinfacher haben es nicht leicht." *Kürbiskern*. 1 (1978): 123-126.
- . *Abseits*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1982. [English edition: *Offside*. Trans. Anthea Bell. London: Virago, 1985.]
- . "Autorinnen im literarischen Ghetto." *Kürbiskern*. 2 (1983): 136-144.
- . *Die Zähmung*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1984. New edition: Berlin: Verbrecher, 2002.
- . [Interview]. Donna L. Hoffmeister. *Vertrauter Alltag, gemischte Gefühle. Gespräche mit Schriftstellern über Arbeit in der Literatur*. Bonn: Bouvier, 1989. 101-119.
- . "Bandwürmer im Leib des Literaturbetriebs." *Unsere Zeit. Magazin Literatur*. Oct 1989. XVI-XVII.
- . *Heilig Blut*. First German edition. Ed. Christine Künzel. Berlin: Verbrecher, 2007. [Russian edition in a collection of works: *Izbranoe. Za čertoj. Chailigbljut. Ispytane na porčnost. Rasskazy*. Translated by Nina Litvinez. Moskau: Raduga, 1987.]
- Elsner, Gisela Elsner, and Klaus Roehler. *Wespen im Schnee. 99 Briefe und ein Tagebuch*. Ed. Franziska Günther-Herold, and Angela Drescher. Berlin: Aufbau, 2001.
- Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. "Einführung." *Vorzeichen – Fünf neue deutsche Autoren*. Ed. H. M. Enzensberger. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1962. 112-156.
- Flitner, Christine. *Frauen in der Literaturkritik: Gisela Elsner und Elfriede Jelinek im Feuilleton der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1995.
- Gaier, Ulrich. *Satire. Studien zu Neidhart, Wittenweiler, Brant und zur satirischen Schreibart*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967.
- Gregson, Ian. *Character and satire in post-war fiction*. London: Continuum, 2006.
- Heidemann-Nebelin, Klaudia. *Rotkäppchen erlegt den Wolf. Marieluise Fleißer, Christa Reinig und Elfriede Jelinek als satirische Schriftstellerinnen*. Bonn: Holos, 1994.
- Hermand, Jost. *Nach der Postmoderne. Ästhetik heute*. Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2004.

- Heydebrand, Renate von/Winko, Simone. "Geschlechterdifferenz und literarischer Kanon. Historische Beobachtungen und systematische Überlegungen." *IASL – Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*. 19.2 (1994): 96-172.
- Hinck, Walter. "Einführung in die Theorie des Komischen und der Komödie." *Die deutsche Komödie: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. Ed. W. Hinck. Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1977. 11-31.
- Hodgart, Matthew. *Satire*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969.
- Hoppe, Felicitas. [Interview with Friedrich W. Block]. "Das Fräuleinwunder und der Humor." *Komik – Medien – Gender*. Ed. Friedrich W. Block. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2006. 247-254.
- Horace [Quintus Horatius Flaccus]. *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*. With an English translation by H. Rushton Fairclough. 1926. London: William Heinemann, 1947.
- Jelinek, Elfriede. [Interview]. Donna L. Hoffmeister. *Vertrauter Alltag, gemischte Gefühle. Gespräche mit Schriftstellern über Arbeit in der Literatur*. Bonn: Bouvier, 1989. 118-133.
- . "Ist die Schwarze Köchin da? Ja, ja, ja!" *Die letzte Kommunistin. Texte zu Gisela Elsner*. Ed. Christine Künzel. Hamburg: Konkret, 2009. 23-28.
- Kairoff, Claudia Thomas. "Gendering Satire: Behn to Burney." *A Companion to Satire*. Ed. Rubin Quintero. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007. 276-292.
- Kinder, Hermann. "Gisela Elsner – der entsorgte Stachel" Gisela Elsner. *Die Riesenzwerg*. Hamburg: Rotbuch, 1995. 290-301.
- Knight, Charles A. *The Literature of Satire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Kotthoff, Helga. "Geschlechterverhältnisse in der Scherzkommunikation: Althergebrachtes und neue Trends in Alltags- und Fernsehkomik." *Komik – Medien – Gender*. Ed. Friedrich W. Block. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2006. 205-246.
- Künzel, Christine. "Gisela Elsner. *Die Riesenzwerg* (1964)." *Meisterwerke – Deutschsprachige Autorinnen im 20. Jahrhundert*. Eds. Claudia Benthien, and Inge Stephan. Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2005. 93-109.
- . "Eine 'schreibende Kleopatra': Autorschaft und Maskerade bei Gisela Elsner." *Autorinszenierungen. Autorschaft und literarisches Werk im Kontext der Medien*. Eds. Christine Künzel/Jörg Schönert. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007. 177-190.
- . "Einmal im Abseits, immer im Abseits? Anmerkungen zum Verschwinden der Autorin Gisela Elsner." *Die letzte Kommunistin. Texte zu Gisela Elsner*. Ed. Christine Künzel. Hamburg: Konkret, 2009. 7-20.
- Kunstreich, Tjark. "Eine Kommunistin wird versöhnt." *Jungle World*. 19/1999 (1999). 18 May 2007 <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/periodika/jungle_world/2000/19/27a.htm>.

---. "Unversöhnter Abgang." *Konkret*. 5 (2002): 53.

---. "Hoffnung auf Zerstörung." *Konkret*. 5 (2007): 48-49.

Laemmle, Peter. "Von der Außenwelt zur Innenwelt. Das Ende der deutschen Nachkriegsliteratur: Peter Handke und die Folgen." *Positionen im deutschen Roman der sechziger Jahre*. Eds. Heinz Ludwig Arnold, and Theo Buck. München: Edition Text+Kritik, 1974. 147-170.

Lazarowicz, Klaus. *Verkehrte Welt. Vorstudien zur Geschichte der deutschen Satire*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1963.

Lindhoff, Lena. *Einführung in die feministische Literaturtheorie*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995.

Löffler, Sigrid. "Die Masken der Elfriede Jelinek." *Elfriede Jelinek*. Ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold. München: Edition Text+Kritik, 2007. 3-14.

März, Ursula. "Die Frau mit dem Helm." *Die Zeit*. 3 May 2007. 64.

Metzler Lexikon Literatur. Begriffe und Definitionen. Eds. Günther and Irmgard Schweikle. 2nd. Rev. ed. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990.

Meuser, Michael. "'Doing Masculinity' – Zur Geschlechtslogik männlichen Gewalthandelns." *Gewalt-Verhältnisse: Feministische Perspektiven auf Geschlecht und Gewalt*. Eds. Regina-Maria Dackweiler, and Reinhild Schäfer. Frankfurt a. M., New York: Campus, 2002. 53-78.

Meyers, Mathias. "über gisela elsner." *Unsere Zeit*. 9 June 2000. 9.

Mindt, Carsten. *Verfremdung des Vertrauten. Zur literarischen Ethnografie der ‚Bundesdeutschen‘ im Werk Gisela Elsners*. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2009.

Möhrmann, Renate. "Feministische Trends in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur." *Deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur. Ausgangspositionen und aktuelle Entwicklungen*. Ed. Manfred Durzak. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981. 336-358.

Morrien, Rita. "'Böse Blicke'. Der Gesellschaftsroman von Frauen nach 1945." *Frauen Literatur Geschichte: Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. Eds. Hiltrud Gnüg, and Renate Möhrmann. 2nd rev. and abr. ed. Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 1999. 496-515.

Musfeld, Tamara. *Im Schatten der Weiblichkeit. Über die Fesselung weiblicher Kraft und Potenz durch das Tabu der Aggression*. Tübingen: edition diskord, 1996.

Nussbaum, Felicity A. *The Brink of All We Hate. English Satires on Women 1660-1750*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984.

- Peiter, Anne D. "Satire und Kanonbildung im Wien der Zwischen- und Nachkriegszeit." *Literarische Wertung und Kanonbildung*. Eds. Nicholas Saul, and Ricarda Schmidt. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007. 45-56.
- Polt-Heinzl, Evelyne. "Zu früh geboren, zu früh gestorben. Gisela Elsners literarisches Schaffen im Kontext ihrer Zeit." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. 29. Mar. 2003. 80.
- . "'Ich war die erste Frau, die eine Satire [...] schrieb': Gisela Elsner (1937-1992)." *Zeitlos. Neun Porträts. Von der ersten Krimiautorin Österreichs bis zur ersten Satirikerin Deutschlands*. Wien: Milena, 2005. 183-204.
- . "Ausbruch der Wölfe." *Die Presse*. 28 Apr. 2007.
- Purdy, Susan. *Comedy. The Mastery of Discourse*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- Rasper, Christiane. "Lust-Mörderinnen in der Sprache: Satirische Texte von Frauen und ihr kämpferisches Potential." *Frauen – Literatur – Revolution*. Eds. Helga Grubitzsch, Maria Kublitz, Dorothea Mey, and Ingeborg Singendonk-Heublein. Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1992. 291-299.
- Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft. Vol. 3: P-Z. Ed. Jan-Dirk Müller. 3rd rev. ed. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003.
- Rutschky, Katharina. "In Zeiten des Froschtests." *Frankfurter Rundschau*. 2 May 2002. 20.
- Schöfer, Erasmus. "Gisela Elsners Schwarzer Grimm." *Rheinische Post*. 23 May 1964.
- Schönert, Jörg. *Roman und Satire im 18. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Poetik..* Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969.
- Schwind, Klaus. "Verflüchtigung von Satire im gleich-wertigen Allerlei?" *Neohelicon. Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*. XVI.1 (1989): 129-150.
- Simpson, Paul. *On the Discourse of Satire. Towards a stylistic model of satirical humour*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2003.
- Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *Encyclopedia of Satirical Literature*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1996.
- Spiegel, Hubert. "Königin Lear auf der Heide." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 20 Apr. 2000. 43.
- Stauß, Barbara. *Schauriges Lachen. Komische Schreibweisen bei Christa Reinig, Irmtraud Morgner und Elfriede Jelinek*. Sulzbach/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer, 2009.
- Uecker, Karin. *Hat das Lachen ein Geschlecht? Zur Charakterisierung von komischen Figuren in Theaterstücken zeitgenössischer Autorinnen*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2002.

Wackerhagen, Hilde. "Warum schreiben Frauen so wenig Satiren?" *Frauenstrategien*. Ed. Susann Heenen. Frankfurt a. M.: Neue Kritik, 1984. 138-166.

Weigel, Sigrid. "Das schauernde Lachen von Frauen – satirische Schreibweisen." *Die Stimme der Medusa: Schreibweisen in der Gegenwartsliteratur von Frauen*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989. 170-176.

Worcester, David. *The Art of Satire*. 1940. New York, NY: Russell & Russell, 1960/1968.

Dis-placing Laughter in *30 Rock*. Beyond Corporate Comedy or Back to the Funny Female's Modern Roots

By Anja Gerigk, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Germany

Abstract:

The significance of *30 Rock*'s TV comedy for gendered laughter can only be evaluated fully if historical and theoretical perspectives are combined: Between Liz Lemon and her Boss Jack Donaghy a socially pre-modern comedy of carnivalesque reversal and familiarization clashes with a type of ambiguity that results from the different systems within modern society as described by Niklas Luhmann. While the corporate man's sense of humour is tied to institutional hierarchies the funny female character may have become an institution – as head writer and star comedienne –, but her metafictional ironies are used to risk and secure follow-up in a way that shows awareness both of the change in social organization and the established status of women in comedy today. Even if the conditions of being subversive are not the same as in earlier waves of feminism and modernity, *30 Rock*'s arrangement of comic modes owes its sophistication not simply to media intertextuality, the history and gender politics of comic communication turn out to be more structurally revealing.

1 The TV comedy show *30 Rock* is currently celebrated for seizing positions of media establishment for the comedienne: Starred, written and produced by Tina Fey it features Liz Lemon as head writer of fictional TGS (= The Girly Show), modelled after Saturday Night Live (= SNL), an institution in American TV comedy, where Fey used to be head writer before starting her own *30 Rock*. That women have achieved celebrity status in the comic genre as both leading actresses and authors makes for the latest advancement in this area of popular culture. Old gender stereotypes aside, even beautiful ladies can be funny and in control. A story for *Vanity Fair* magazine investigates relations of power, beauty and comedic talent, displaying the “queens of comedy” (Stanley) on the cover: Sarah Silverman, Tina Fey and Amy Poehler, draped as Greek goddesses with golden laurel wreaths.

2 *30 Rock* has invited a number of feminist readings, with some controversy about the main character Liz Lemon. Is she a toned down version of the “unruly woman” (Rowe) with her sharp tongue and love of food? “Unruly” sums up the disruptive qualities “too fat, too funny, too noisy, too old, too rebellious” (19) that allow women the power of visibility by “fashioning – as subject, as author, as artist – a spectacle of themselves” (11) Is Liz the third wave feminist as corporate girl or Tina Fey's tongue-in-cheek comment on that type? The following appraisal does not take the character approach, instead the show's internal differentiation of comic modes will be analysed. As it turns out, *30 Rock* is structurally concerned with the gendered “genres of laughter” and their ties to a history of feminism and humour. To

pursue this line of argument it will become necessary at some point to introduce a more theoretical understanding of comic communication in modern society, different both from the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and from postmodern fictional irony.

3 *30 Rock* consists of three distinct, yet overlapping comic settings: first and foremost, the workplace “inside NBC”; secondly TGS, a live sketch comedy show produced in those fictional NBC-studios; and finally a special kind of interaction between Liz Lemon and her boss Jack Donaghy. This non-romantic couple is not only at the spotlight of the program’s critical acclaim, with awards for both actors, it also marks crucial scenes, in which a displacement of laughter occurs that surprisingly takes the possibilities of female humour to the next historical level. Before this is studied and explored theoretically, the genres of NBC and TGS need to be described as well as subjected to gender criticism.

4 The major part of *30 Rock*’s comedy works satirically and is drawn from situations or characters inside the big broadcasting company, located at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. Especially in the first two seasons many of the episode storylines are topical, dealing with media policies such as product placement (Season 1, Episode 5, “Jack-Tor”) as well as broader issues like homeland security (Season 2, Episode 6, “Somebody To Love”) or environmental initiatives (Season 2, Episode 5, “Greenzo”): Jack Donaghy, leading executive at NBC and subdivision manager of General Electrics, introduces a green superman character that is supposed to promote GE products with “saving the earth”-messages, but starts to take his mission so seriously that, counter to Donaghy’s intentions, he is no longer “business-friendly”. However, any regular viewer will note that Liz Lemon is equally involved in those politics, be it as head of writing staff or privately when she suspects her neighbour Raheem of planning a terrorist attack when in fact he and his brother are practicing to take part in the TV competition “The American Race” (= *The Amazing Race*), a pun on anti-Arabic racism. Generally, *30 Rock* seems careful to balance workplace and private life scenes for each, Liz and Jack, so as not to simply reproduce gender tendencies for either home or business. Lemon’s boss has been going through more *Sex and the City*-like dating stories than his employee.

5 Satire in *30 Rock* explores the whole range of political correctness, feminism being only one of the sources. In “Believe in the Stars” (Season 3, Episode 2) TGS actors Tracy Jordan and Jenna Maroney cross-dress in their respective social roles to find out who suffers more from discrimination: black male or white female? Their mediator supplies the hybridising third option by lamenting his own trouble: “Do you know how hard it is to be an overweight transgender in this country?” Tracy and Jenna, over-the-top caricatures of gender and ethnic stereotypes, share the levelling trait of (almost) complete celebrity self-centredness.

They take advantage of star-struck, overeager Kenneth, the page. This religiously fundamentalist naïve from the South completes the line of topical characters.

6 The treatment of feminism, to single out this field of satirical humour, uses a deconstructive technique by displacing positions of utterance: Sexist commentary or behaviour as well as its feminist criticism may come from any of the three characters Liz, Jenna and even Jack. While Liz is the obvious champion of women's rights Jenna usually acts as an example of all the jokes on famous or not so famous blondes. Still, she also typically speaks as the voice of female empowerment. Whenever Lemon claims "It's different for women" – being a tough boss, having a much younger sexual partner – she is rebuked by Donaghy: "That is so sexist of you. To that clueless boy over there you're a very powerful woman." (Season 2, Episode 7, "Cougars") The same Jack Donaghy applauds Lemon for "thinking like a businessman" and on being corrected "a business woman" by Liz herself only answers: "I don't think that's a word." (Season 2, Episode 3, "The Collection") Apart from these instances it would be advisable to look at the wider framework of the show to assess the way it becomes engaged in a critical discussion of gender differences:

30 Rock's blending of the fictional and the biographical might also be the show's greatest contribution to scholars investigating the intersection of gender and political economy in media production, particularly as Fey constructs an avatar and, in the process, presents what can be read as a self-reflective feminist critique of working in the culture industry. (Vesey, Lambert)

This holds true for the NBC-locale as a meta-fictional context set by the double role of Tina Fey/Liz Lemon as writer/actress. It provides an overriding perspective that affects our perception of the politically incorrect jokes presented on character level.

7 "The Girly Show with Tracy Jordan" (TGS), the sketch comedy written by Liz Lemon's team, remains at the background of *30 Rock*; it is more referenced to than actually represented. When we do get a glimpse of the skits and bits on TGS, they centre on celebrity parodies including politicians and on bodily functions. A best-of-reel assembled to protect the show from "Cutbacks" (Season 3, Episode 17) features a mad scientist's "farting machine" and a temporarily overweight Jenna on roller skates, covering her unintended fall with the catch phrase "Me want food!" The comic setting can thus be categorized as carnivalesque. Its emphasis lies on the grotesque body, as Bakhtin found it in Rabelais: "The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation" (26). This is complemented by another carnivalesque measure, i.e. social inversion, the symbolic downfall of today's ruling class in media: Condoleezza Rice, Paris Hilton, Oprah Winfrey.

8 The conspicuous fact that many of the objects of parody are female drives a feminist point where none would be expected: women have become powerful enough to be spoofed. This is a step forward in comic emancipation when compared to the unruly woman who has to make a spectacle of herself to be noticed, just like Jenna's "Me want food"-character. Other critics would argue that her persona's forceful articulation of bodily needs, characteristic of third wave feminism, is defused by commercialising the humour of it: T-shirts with the punch line sell big and afford Jenna the attention she craves more than food. While on the level of character this would indeed constitute an "appropriation" (Shugart, Egley Waggoner, O' Brian Hallstein) of feminist positions by media practice, on the meta-level *30 Rock* reflects on that very practice. Moreover, it offers an alternative by subjecting Liz Lemon, who holds a superior position within the media, to carnivalesque laughter.

9 Though shared interests have been demonstrated NBC and TGS, the satirical and the grotesque mode of *30 Rock* must not be confused. The episode ending of "The Break-Up" (Season 1, Episode 8) is a case in point. Toofer, Harvard educated writer, disagrees with actor Tracy on how African Americans, a group they both belong to, should represent themselves. After sensitivity training they reconcile and decide to write a sketch on "racial relations" together. Yet, this piece is never shown on TGS, as Tracy prefers to impersonate TV presenter Star Jones in a "gastric bypass cooking show" eating and throwing up, which the studio audience apparently finds hilarious. Even Toofer admits that "this *is* actually funnier". Here, TGS is exposed as the lower, narrower form of comedy. All the political satire associated with the real SNL-tradition has been taken from its fictitious equivalent and transferred to the storylines "inside NBC". Reading *30 Rock* thus requires the ability to consider different genres of laughter separately while on the other hand they have to be placed within an overall self-referential, intertextual narrative. The same goes for the one site of comedy that remains to be scrutinized: the dialogue between the main character and her boss.

10 If you are looking for a strong unifying feature of the whole program it can be found in what I will call "corporate comedy". While in the title sequence the famous towering GE building is viewed from below, the series itself unfolds behind the scenes of a popular show produced by a major network. That *30 Rock* takes place in a hyper-institutional environment is most noticeable when we follow Liz Lemon into the office of Jack Donaghy, "head of east coast television and microwave oven programming". To enter the higher realm of NBC owned by General Electric's owned by the fictitious Sheinhardt Wig Company she has to ride the elevator up to the 52nd floor. In a 21st century update of carnivalesque reversal the show deals with the most sacred institutions of media and economy only to bring them down to

earth. As it says in *Problems of Dostevsky's Poetics*, what carnival suspends “first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it” (123). “Liz” and “Jack” are collaborative agents of this humour due to their friendship that practises “familiarization” (123) across the gap of hierarchy.

11 Despite this corporate comedy and collaborative carnival the same central relationship is responsible for introducing a difference relevant to both the history of comic communication and to gender in historical terms. One of the most revealing episodes in that respect would be “Jack-Tor” (Season 1, Episode 5). Donaghy has recorded a training video for the writing staff at NBC: Being vice president of General Electrics, he explains his company’s philosophy of product placement, “pos-mens” in marketing speech, “positive mentions”. Later, a blooper reel reveals that Jack is competent economically but fails disastrously as an actor. Communicating in a wholly different social sphere he is not even able to articulate the words anymore: What is “product integortion (= integration)” anyway? Apart from providing the means to economic ends the media seems to have its own logic the business man is not familiar with, at least not when it comes to acting. Also, Donaghy’s high rank proves to be irrelevant to the social situation he is faced with. Both conditions are crucial, as the incident comically exploits the fact that modern society, according to the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann, is no longer organized hierarchically, like in the Middle Ages, but follows the “functional differentiation” (190) of autonomous subsystems.¹ Although individuals are able to act in more than one system, principles are different. Later on in the episode, Liz tries to crack a joke to Jack who leaves for a conference with his corporate division head: “Oh, yeah, you guys gonna correlate overseas earnings report dynamics” (pauses in between, gestures indicating improvisation). Jack (dead serious in tone and facial expression): “Yes.” The disruption of communication obviously works both ways even if the joke does not.

12 Liz and Jack do not have the same sense of humour, yet there are social and gender related reasons for that discrepancy. At least, Donaghy recognizes Lemon’s expertise in comedy writing. In “Tracy does Conan” (Season 1, Episode 7) he asks her to suggest a funny opening line for a speech at a high class social event. Liz: “I haven’t seen as many white people in tuxedos since the Titanic.” Jack: “Lemon, this is not Open Mike Night at the Bryn Mawr Student Union.” Her one-liner is answered by his sexist and elitist sarcastic repartee. The second suggestion is not received any more favourably: “Wow, a thousand dollars a

¹ Andreas Böhn’s article mentions the relevance of Luhmann’s concept of changing social differentiation for comedy (55), but does not develop a theory in its own right.

plate! For that kind of money this stuffed chicken breast better paint my house.” Judging by their actual position, she is “joking up”, making fun of the privileged group, whereas he is “joking down” at those who have not established themselves yet. His reference to all female college Bryn Mawr puts a gender twist to the whole exchange. As a professional funny woman Liz attempts to joke down, but her satirical and social alliances betray themselves which, drawing on postcolonial theory, can be considered an act of subversive mimicry. Jack, on the other hand, is fixated on status, which is exactly why his punch line, a convoluted comment on his business friend’s managerial skills, “doesn’t even make sense”, as Liz rightly observes. From a theoretical point of view Donaghy fails to understand comedy because he is caught up in a pre-modern social order whose hierarchies are only exemplified by today’s corporate thinking. This would render the approach gendered as male anachronistic while the comedienne knows how to communicate flexibly, in different subsystems of society. Besides, she uses the leeway of ambiguous attribution to have fun with it. This is, of course, even more valid with regard to Tina Fey who has written Jack’s lines as well.

13 Taking the meta-fictional situation into account there is a difference between Liz Lemon, the comedy writer of TGS and Liz Lemon, the leading comedy actress in *30 Rock*. Jack Donaghy can not handle both levels equally well. In the episode analysed before, the former was referred to, the function of professional humour within the fictional frame. Whenever Lemon delivers a punch line in the midst of serious conversation, however, Donaghy looks bewildered instead of amused. “Black Tie” (Season 1, Episode 12) starts out, as an exception, at the site of TGS, with Liz directing her actors. She takes the stage herself to show them how it is done: “What is the difference between your Mama and a washing machine? – When I drop a load in the washing machine it doesn’t follow me around for a week.” After this male chauvinist joke she is addressed by Donaghy: “Lemon, can I speak with you alone, please.” Liz: “That’s what your sister asked me last night, booyah!” Maybe he does not react, because the ghetto style of this joke misses his class humour or because he misses that she is only acting male. The context has staged Lemon’s double role as director and actor of a comedy show so what Jack really has no sensibility for is irony, fictional irony in particular. As the serious conversation goes on Liz agrees to accompany her boss to a social event: “OK fine, I’ll do it, but I’m not gonna like it.” – Jack (very seriously): “That’s what your mom said to me last night – booyah.” Liz bursts out laughing, saying to herself when he has left: “That was surprising.” Indeed it was, for the corporate man has once managed to produce a follow up to the show’s professional, ironical type of humour,

something which Jack Donaghy is incapable of but which actor Alec Baldwin is certainly brilliant at.

14 To further develop the gender argument: The male character's lack of meta-fictional awareness is indicative of a lack of social as well as historical awareness. In contrast to the funny female of *30 Rock* he has not adjusted his humour to the change in societal differentiation: from hierarchy (pre-modern) to functionally independent systems (modern). Luhmann's theory further assumes that communication and, therefore, society is based on follow up. Every type of organization limits the factor of surprise in what is said and done socially. The underlying problem of "double contingency" (Luhmann, 105) has to be accounted for, the fact that one person interacting neither knows what to expect of the other person nor what this other expects him to expect. Apart from primary differentiation, a social relation that reduces contingency is friendship. Between Liz and Jack we have seen several counter-tendencies that multiply the risk of misunderstanding or rather precarious follow up. Providing an abstract definition, this ambivalence characterizes comic communication at any point in history. In comedy the impulse to communicate will always assert itself, yet it asserts itself against strategies of subverting the respective historical principle of organization.

15 So far it has been suggested that Liz Lemon is superior to and historically ahead of Jack Donaghy in her practice of modern comic communication. But beyond that *30 Rock*'s advanced structure can be traced down to the past of feminist humour, a question that comes to the fore in "Rosemary's Baby" (Season 2, Episode 4). Comedy writer Rosemary Howard belongs to so-called second-wave feminism: In the sixties and seventies an anti-patriarchal stance was taken in all matters of cultural politics. Initially, Lemon looks to Howard as an idol and pioneer in her field, yet the radical take of "pushing the envelope" (Howard) clashes with the limited subversion at TGS. When Rosemary, as guest writer, pitches the sketch idea of a "mulatto" in an "abortion clinic", Liz resorts to timid political correctness, claiming that those words are not allowed anymore. As she has just received the GE "followership award" presented to "the woman, sorry, person who best exemplifies a follower" (Jack) it is very clear that the episode satirizes a backlash in feminism. The title reference to Polanski's film applies to Liz following in the footsteps of second-wave comediennes and to Howard as well "who by the end of the episode literally becomes the burden Liz Lemon bears – psychologically as a reminder of feminism's (troubled) legacy" (Vesey, Lambert).

16 From the angle of feminist history the bottom line is uttered by Rosemary herself: "You can not abandon me, Liz. You *are* me. [...] I broke barriers for you." Comparing the

two types of comedy, *30 Rock* and Howard's proclaimed radicalism, a different picture emerges. First, the actual show in contrast to TGS is not afraid of political incorrectness and pushes the limits of comic taboo in a sophisticated, self-reflective manner. Secondly, Rosemary's provocative take on gendered laughter seems outdated rather than progressive: After stirring Liz to quit her job, she drafts a joint film project about "women in their fifties [who] join the army and get laid by a bunch of grateful eighteen-year-olds". Moreover, the female comedy veteran is mentally and historically disoriented, thinking it is still "the 90ies". This does not mean, however, that her successor or even *30 Rock* represents the ultimate state of the art. In fact, the "followership"-award admits the very difficulty of creating a female style of comedy now that comediennes are irrevocably working within the system. The meta-level in *30 Rock* is not gratuitous irony but a way to highlight and process that complication which has been narrated as historical outcome by "Rosemary's Baby".

17 Returning to the earlier assumption – society's structural change affects comic communication – there is a story about the funny female left untold. Throughout the 19th century, when societal differentiation was already modern, i.e. functional, women's laughter was still defined within hierarchical gender relations of humour. If they chose to write in the comic genre their distribution of subjects and objects of laughter was shaped by male hegemony. For example, in the drama *Das Manuscript* (1826) the author Johanna v. Weißenthurn makes a change by ridiculing the male attitude of genius and taking the heroine seriously, who is scorned by men for her literary ambitions. This is more of an anti-hierarchical reversal than modern subversion of communication. Consequently, women run the risk of being stuck for ever in the carnivalesque or, as it were, postcolonial period of comedy. Neither Rosemary's rebellious attacks nor Liz's mimicry escapes this continuation of the past. Besides, they have lost an advantage caused by their gender fellows' belated comic emancipation. As long as the funny female was an exception, not an institution that non-place would have been well suited for unexpected joking. Precisely because they had no position those earliest precursors of Lemon and Howard were in the position to disrupt social follow-up by the improbability of women using the comic mode. To recreate that crisis of attribution, that element of surprise essential to modern humour *30 Rock* makes the effort of building a complex structure that dis-places female laughter, not least by meta-fictional ambiguities.

18 Now that the theoretical as well as historical reading is laid out it should be no longer far-fetched to attribute a unique status to *30 Rock*: Its historiography of gender and humour, its contemporary quality does not depend on feminist orthodoxy, be it third or second wave. Tina Fey hardly turns back the time to the days when women had no business making jokes,

let alone at their own expense. Rather the past alternatives for female comedy or women's laughter in general are built into the show's comedic scope, its internal differences and the metaleptic running gag afforded by its creative and corporate background. The proof of *30 Rock's* avant-garde aspirations is not in TGS-carnival or NBC-satire, the unlikely friendship between Jack Donaghy and Liz Lemon sets the standard. As final example, "Retreat to Move Forward" (Season 3, Episode 9) deserves to be examined. It sums up the reasons why Liz Lemon pushes beyond the unruly woman. In this scenario she is definitely not the one who needs mentoring, but a master of communication who saves her boss.

19 Jack asks Liz to come with him on a corporate retreat. Nervous about a legendary band of business coaches he needs moral support, but his familiarity with the female subordinate is frowned upon by the men from "Six Sigma". All the same Donaghy stays true to his "camp buddy" (Liz) taking her to "L.U.N.C.H", explained as: "Lego Utilization for Negating Crisis Hierarchies", a "competitive team exercise". That "C.L.A.S.S" stands for lunch time break Liz finds "intentionally confusing". This confusion does not keep her from excelling at the Lego task and becoming impatient with Donaghy who is supposed to give instructions, being the only one with a map of the train model the group has to build: "Don't stop talking, Jack, always be talking!" Apart from affirming the communicative skills of women this may allude to the basic social process of constant follow-up. Liz acts more competitive than any other businessman or -woman in the exercise. After her group has won ("Suck it, losers!") she takes the longish Lego engine and pretends "it is my penis" in unintentional travesty of the ruling aggressive power display – the "penis" breaks. The parody continues nonetheless with Liz playing "robot penis", complete with robot voice. She is "unruly" by over-adjustment, by outperforming the male agenda. She also stretches the limits of carnivalesque familiarity and reversal when taking the lead during team work, making fun of Jack's slow reactions at L.U.N.C.H: "Say something, haircut!" – "Adoy!" It almost seems like a revenge for all the times her boss has mocked her social ineptitude. Donaghy, intimidated and embarrassed by her outburst, is at the same time proud of his friend's achievement.

20 The climax of "Retreat to Move Forward" is yet to come. Liz and Jack are both in the habit of giving themselves psych-up speeches before important occasions, with the slight gender difference that she calls herself "stupid bitch" for breaking a sweat in the face of unknown people at a party while he tells the "son of a bitch" in the mirror that "it's winning time" before giving a lecture as management expert. Unfortunately, the microphone is already on, so the whole audience at the Six Sigma-meeting listens to Jack's soliloquy. For once, Donaghy's fetish for corporate power disables him, as he can not immediately recover from

the shame. Liz has rushed backstage to stop his involuntary comic performance. Before she enters the stage to create a distraction we get to hear her state of mind: “I got nothing.” At this point, the crisis has arrived as it can not be predicted how and if Lemon will succeed in promoting the process of communication. Introducing herself as “Liz Lemon from the entertainment division” is quite a clever move, because it addresses the social system of economy, thus making sure that the interaction will go on. “Let’s maximise the fun quadrant of this evening,” she shouts out to the crowd. Further enhancing this effect, the impromptu-format offered by the “entertainment division” gives her a chance to talk about anything.

21 “I just fooled you all with my Jack Donaghy-impression” – in this particular scene Liz tries to lift the disgrace off Jack. She does this by changing social attribution from unintended ridiculousness in a business situation to professional comedy. It almost works out; when she asks a man from the audience “What’s the craziest thing that happened to you this weekend, Dave?” he insists on: “Hearing Jack Donaghy talk on that microphone.” Dave gets the laughs for this statement of fact. Still, Lemon’s performance takes on another dimension if understood as a *mise en abyme* of *30 Rock*. As we have seen before, whenever the character Liz takes the stage this introduces self-reflection within the narrative. It is indeed striking that all the modes of *30 Rock* are featured in this variety show in a nutshell: stand-up comedy, sketch comedy, (musical) parody, but also social satire and media intertextuality with a reference to the 70ies sitcom *Happy Days*. It might therefore not be Liz Lemon but Tina Fey who “fooled [us] all with [her] Jack Donaghy-impression”. Evidently, because she wrote his misogynist sarcasm, less obviously, because she lets Liz play the mimicry-part: The “penis” she takes on, adopting Jack’s gendered philosophy of life and work, is made of Lego. The whole episode is remarkable for revealing the comedy author of *30 Rock* to be female, not by way of contextual knowledge, but in a meta-fictional constellation within the text.

22 When Dave remains unimpressed Liz makes the final desperate move: “Not anymore” will the microphone-incident be the “craziest thing” now that she rips open her blouse with her bra showing, vocally rendering and dancing to the 1990ies hit “Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody Dance Now)” by C + C Music Factory. Afterwards more attendants talk about “the bra lady that went crazy” than about Donaghy’s fall from business grace. Back in New York, Jack thanks Liz and calls her “heroic”, the friends are reunited. What happened is that the unruly woman has taken the bullet for the corporate man. Baring her breast in true TGS-style, she has more than just made a spectacle of herself. On one level she snatches the leading part from co-star Jack Donaghy/Alec Baldwin: Liz Lemon after all *is* the main character of *30 Rock* who causes laughter by embarrassing herself. On another level, she

discloses the female author. Acting as writer she finally proves her superior grasp of what it means to be funny in a modern society of subsystems. Unrelated yet unforgettable: the loving expression on Jack's face while he watches his "buddy" being silly and unafraid.

23 "Retreat to Move Forward", the episode title, could be a motto for the issue pervading *30 Rock*: What are the possibilities of gendered humour today and how do they relate to the historical range of women's laughter? You can not retreat to move forward, considering that politics and the media have changed since the days of Rosemary Howard. You can not retreat to move forward, considering that a joke from a star comedienne will never be as socially disturbing as female wit in those centuries when women were generally the objects not the agents of laughter. There is no going back from institutional comedy and no going back to the purely hierarchical order of social relations. You will advance, however, if you include those historical perspectives into the program. You will advance, if you do not retreat from any kind of humour: feminist or sexist, ironical or physical. If the interplay between fictional action and the meta-level of writing is as highly artistic as in *30 Rock* the resulting disguises and exposures can actually surprise the post-modern viewer. Tina Fey has not fooled us, but maybe we are still none the wiser about the place of the funny female.

Works Cited

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson. Introduction by Wayne C. Booth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- . *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Böhn, Andreas. "Subversions of Gender Identities through Laughter and the Comic." *Gender and Laughter. Comic Affirmation and Subversion in Traditional and Modern Media*. Eds. Gaby Pailer, Andreas Böhn, Stefan Horlacher, and Ulrich Scheck. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009. 49-64.
- Luhmann, Niklas. *Social Systems*. Translated by John Bednarz, Jr with Dirk Baecker. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Rowe, Kathleen. *The Unruly Woman. Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1995.
- Shugart, Helen A., Catherine Egley Waggoner, and D. Lynn O'Brian Hallstein. "Mediating Third-Wave-Feminism. Appropriation as Postmodern Media Practice." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 18. 2 (2001): 194-210.
- Stanley, Alessandra. "Who Says Women Aren't Funny?" *Vanity Fair*. April 2008: 182-191.
- Vesey A., and K. Lambert. "I Can Have It All". *Liz Lemon Negotiates Power, One Sandwich at a Time*. 7 Juli 2010 .
- Thirty Rock*. By Tina Fey. NBC, 2006-.

List of Contributors

Margaret D. Stetz, the Mae and Robert Carter Professor of Women's Studies and Professor of Humanities at the University of Delaware, has published over 100 essays on women's literature and culture, on film, and on 19th and 20th Century publishing history. She has also been curator or co-curator of seven exhibitions on late-Victorian print culture and the visual arts. Among her recent books are *British Women's Comic Fiction, 1890–1990* (2001), *Gender and the London Theatre* (2004), *Facing the Late Victorians* (2007), and the co-edited volume, *Michael Field and Their World* (2007).

Eduard Lerperger is a diploma student at the University of Salzburg's English department. Among his fields of research are popular culture studies such as television, film and comic studies. He is interested in humor and satire in literature, such as in the novels of Anita Loos, P.G. Wodehouse and Stephen Fry. He is well versed in fantastic and speculative fiction and is preparing his diploma thesis on literary prizes in science fiction. This is his first publication.

Christine Künzel, PD Dr. phil., 1997 M.A. in German Studies, American Studies and Philosophy at the University of Hamburg. 2003, Ph.D. at Humboldt-University Berlin. 2000-2006, teaching assignments at the universities of Hamburg, Hannover and Oldenburg. Winter-semester 2006/07, 2007/08, 2009/10 and in summer-semester 2009, work as substitute professor of contemporary German literature and theatre at the German Department of the University of Hamburg. July 2011, Habilitation (post-doctoral degree) with a study on the complete works of Gisela Elsner at the University of Hamburg. Since 2006 editor of the works of Gisela Elsner published at Verbrecher Verlag, Berlin.

Dr Anja Gerigk, born 1977, research assistant in German literature (NdL), Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, PhD 2005 University of Bamberg, studies in German and English/American literature at Bamberg and the University of St. Andrews. Monographs: *Das Verhältnis ethischer und ästhetischer Rede über Literatur* (2006), *Literarische Hochkomik in der Moderne* (2008); edited volume *Glück paradox* (2010, transcript Verlag). Published articles focus on narrative modernity and on the methodology of cultural history.